

War and terror. War on terror. A semantic axis in the post-9/11 US political discourse¹

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ABSTRACT

In this work we analyze a particular instance of how language is used for political ends, namely for political persuasion. Official discourse in the United States after September 11th has revolved mainly around a semantic axis built on the concepts of *war* and *terrorism*, combined into a major political motto: "War on terror(ism)". By analyzing conceptual problems related to the definition of *war* and, especially, of *terrorism*, we find a semantic overlap between the two and we comment on the resulting interplay. Next, we study a corpus of relevant texts, mainly by President Bush, to show how both concepts are articulated into a standard speech model. Finally, we conclude that confusion between these concepts can be used to overlook established legal frameworks like civil rights and public accountability, and thereby to implement a far-reaching domestic and foreign policy agenda.

Keywords: terrorism, United States, definition, language of politics, September 11th

Guerra y terrorismo. Guerra al terrorismo. Un eje semántico del discurso político de EEUU tras el 11-S

RESUMEN

En este trabajo analizamos un caso particular de utilización del lenguaje con fines políticos, concretamente de persuasión de la opinión pública. Tras los atentados del 11 de septiembre, el discurso oficial de Estados Unidos ha girado principalmente en torno a un eje semántico formado por los conceptos de *guerra* y *terrorismo*, asociados en una consigna política básica: "Guerra al terror(ismo)". Analizando algunos problemas conceptuales relacionados con la definición de *guerra*, y especialmente de *terrorismo*, observamos un solapamiento semántico y abordamos la interacción resultante. A continuación estudiamos un corpus de textos pertinentes, principalmente del Presidente Bush, para ver cómo ambos conceptos se articulan en un modelo de discurso. Por último, observamos que la confusión entre estos conceptos puede utilizarse para conculcar marcos jurídicos establecidos, como los derechos civiles y la rendición de cuentas pública, y para así poner en práctica un amplio programa de política interior y exterior.

Palabras clave: terrorismo, Estados Unidos, definición, lenguaje político, 11 de septiembre

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War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. The conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing.

President BUSH, Washington, D.C. (The National Cathedral), September 14, 2001

Le ressort du gouvernement populaire en révolution est à la fois la vertu et la terreur: la vertu, sans laquelle la terreur est funeste; la terreur, sans laquelle la vertu est impuissante. La terreur n'est autre chose que la justice prompte, sévère, inflexible; elle est donc une émanation de la vertu.

Maximilien ROBESPIERRE, discours prononcé à la Convention le 5 février 1794

1. Introduction

1.1. Political context

The attack on New York's World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, brought shock and horror not only to the United States, but also to the whole world. Human reaction was a mixture of panic and bewilderment, anger and pain, sorrow and bereavement. Whether or not September 11th changed the course of history, the events undoubtedly took their toll on the American psyche.

Political reaction in the victim country was swift. It came in the shape of a number of administrative and policy measures by President Bush's administration that have had a lasting impact, directly or indirectly, into the present moment. Some of these measures have aroused widespread controversy, both in the United States and worldwide. Some have been as momentous as two wars. Some have encroached on civil rights. But, in spite of misgivings and controversy, President Bush's policies received a clear popular endorsement at the 2004 election, which gave him a second term in office.

1.2. Aim and scope of the work

The present work is guided by an interest in language as well as in politics. We try to look in some detail into a particular instance of how language is used as a tool for political ends. In this age of communications, the way reality is portrayed in political discourse can – especially in a democracy – have a strong impact on public opinion, whose resulting perceptions will cause it either to back or to oppose existing policies.

We intend to analyze certain aspects of official political discourse in the United States in the aftermath of September 11th. Our aim is to bring to light some major

recurrent themes and the way they are articulated into a standard speech model. Namely, we will show that, since that date, official political discourse has revolved mainly around the interplay of the concepts of war and terrorism. This two terms have, therefore, come to form a semantic axis articulating, to a large extent, public statements by President Bush.

1.3. Methodology

Given that our aim in this work is to show some interactions between political discourse, actual policy and public opinion, our conclusions will be based on an analysis of relevant texts. We will explore how language in general, and certain terms in particular, are used to create a particular effect on the audience, both through denotation and through connotation. We will further show the way in which particular feelings are made to arise in the audience through the usage of concrete terms or speech procedures, thereby appealing to subjective emotions rather than trying to convince through rational, objective argument.

To do this, we have chosen the following corpus of texts:

- a series of public addresses by President Bush in the first moments or days after the September 11th attacks (for details, see *Bibliographic references* at the back);
- President Bush's weekly radio addresses to the nation, from the start of his first mandate until February 2005;
- both of President Bush's inaugural addresses (2001 and 2005);
- the yearly State of the Union Address, from 2002 to 2005;
- a very recent (March 2005) speech by President Bush before a military institution (see *Bibliographic references*);
- and, finally, an official policy document, the National Security Strategy (September 2002).

1.4. Semantics and the language of politics. Some basic notions

Political communication is a particular sort of speech situation with a speaker—the politician—acting as transmitter, and a hearer—public opinion, the citizen—acting as receiver. Besides *prima facie* signification, the discourse itself is an encoded message carrying clues introduced by the speaker in order to convey added meaning. The receiver must decode these hidden elements of meaning at the same time as the obvious elements. When the encoding is shrewd enough, the hidden message will get decoded and understood by the receiver at a subliminal level, it will not get perceived consciously and therefore will be doubly effective.

The language of politics is often distinguished by the resort to labelling, to slogans that catch the attention of audiences and direct their thinking. In order to build their public discourse, politicians tend to select a few simple notions to anchor other constitutive elements of discourse. These central notions acquire in time a specific meaning in the relevant discourse, a meaning deriving from their recurrent usage in a particular context or for a particular purpose. That is to say, they soak up notional

features from the recurring surrounding context and in this way their meaning goes through semantic changes. These changes can concern either of two dimensions, or both: (1) the word's denotation, that is, its direct, straightforward meaning, the "dictionary meaning", which is intrinsic to the word, i.e. the concept the word is supposed to represent; (2) the word's connotation, that is, mental associations the word arouses in the mind of the receiver; they come not from the proper meaning of the word, but rather from the way in which it is usually employed, including the intent of the speaker and surrounding concepts from which it absorbs semantic elements just because of their proximity.

Nearly every speech act can be seen as an attempt by a speaker to portray reality in a certain way to a hearer; by his act, the speaker tries to influence the hearer, that is to say, to convince him of the truth of his view of reality; this is known as the *persuasive function* of language and is present almost in every communication situation. Political speech is particularly marked by this feature, in that the speaker – the politician in this case – has by definition an interest in getting the public's adhesion (preferably in the form of a ballot) to his views or to his person. Perhaps this is why the language of politics is much more prone to manipulation than everyday language. This is not to imply that all political speech is manipulative, only that by its very nature the persuasive function of language happens to slip into manipulation more often in political speech than otherwise.

2. War and terror. An interplay of overlapping concepts

We intend here to explore a particular instance of the use of language in politics by focusing on two terms that have recently been ubiquitous in the prevailing political discourse in the United States since September 11th, 2001: war and terrorism. Not only have these terms been ubiquitous, but they have also been combined into the main political motto used by the Bush administration before public opinion to express its intended course of action: "War on terror(ism)".

We are dealing with two terms that, when considered independently of each other, refer at first sight to apparently clear and distinct concepts. And yet, the situation becomes much more complex when they get confronted to each other, either because they occur simultaneously in the same discourse, or because a particular event has to be characterized as one or the other and a choice between the two becomes necessary. Namely, there is a whole area of semantic overlap between the two concepts that sometimes makes it difficult to know clearly which one should be used. To add to the confusion, extra-semantic factors come into play as well. The interplay of both concepts, as we will see, is marked to some extent by subjective elements, like value judgements, ideology, political interests, etc. At the same time, their combination or confrontation generates a number of conceptual associations that produce a particular scheme of speech.

Of the two terms, *war* is a much older one and its meaning is therefore better set,

giving rise to fewer hesitations. *Terrorism*, on the other hand, is much more recent. Although the term itself goes back only to the late 18th century, terrorism is clearly a modern phenomenon, exploding only since the 1970s². Since the turn of the century it has undergone a marked recrudescence –often with roots in Islamic fundamentalism– that came to a head with the attack on New York’s Twin Towers.

Precisely because of its recent emergence, the meaning of *terrorism* is still elusive, the object of much reflexion and uncertainty. The process of semantic consolidation is still in motion. For this reason, we will study more closely problems associated with the definition of *terrorism* than with that of *war*. By first elucidating the semantic contours of both terms, we will try to understand better how they have been used, either independently or in combined form, in the public pronouncements of the American leadership.

2.1. War. A traditional concept in evolution

“War: (state created by) the use of armed forces between countries or (*civil war*) rival groups in a nation” (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*). In his classic *On War*, Carl von CLAUSEWITZ suggested a very general definition of *war*:

“War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through *physical force* to compel the other *to do his will*; his immediate aim is to throw his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance. *War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.*” [our emphasis] (von CLAUSEWITZ, 1976: 75, § 2)

Since the advent of the nation-state, the idea of war has been associated to concepts such as sovereign states, regular armies, borders, battles, strategy etc. *War* was roughly understood as open armed conflict between states through the agency of regular armies, usually with major clashes called battles and with the purpose either of conquering territory, or of acquiring material resources, or otherwise imposing one’s will on the enemy. These are, in fact, the terms in which von CLAUSEWITZ –implicitly– operates in his work. The *Third Geneva Convention* (art. 2), on the other hand, does not define *war* other than as a kind of armed conflict. It does talk about conflict between the Parties (that is, between states), including peaceful occupation, but it also provides for conflict within a single state.

Aside from particular metaphorical usages we can find in everyday language (for instance, a “war” between mafia families, or a commercial “war”), war is a notion usually associated with politics. Hence the well-known sentence by von Clausewitz “war is the continuation of politics by other means” (von CLAUSEWITZ, 1976: § 24).

². With groups such as the Japanese Red Army, the Palestinian Black September, the Baader-Meinhof in Germany, the Italian Red Brigades, the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, etc.

Despite being a relatively stable concept, *war* (a) does allow for nuancing and qualification, and (b) is undergoing a radical change. Samuel P. HUNTINGTON (1996: 216) talks of an “intercivilizational *quasi* war between Islam and the West” (our emphasis), which he defines in negative terms: (1) “*all of Islam* has *not* been fighting *all of the West*”, (2) “it has been fought with *limited means*”, and (3) “while the violence has been continuing, it has also *not* been *continuous*”. So, further criteria for considering any conflict a war would be the ideas of *generalization* and *intensity* (war is fought by two or more full entities, with full means), and *continuity* (one of the oldest principles of war).

Yet, he goes on to admit that “a quasi war is still a war”. And he explains why: “the deaths and other casualties number well into the thousands, and they occurred in virtually every year after 1979. Many more Westerners have been killed in this quasi war than were killed in the “real” war in the Gulf” (HUNTINGTON, 1996: 216). So, one more element is introduced to configure the concept of war: *numbers*, or the scale of conflict as shown in the level of casualties³.

As for the concept’s evolution, war has not escaped the contemporary dynamics of globalization, especially as regards the vanishing of national borders and of other reassuring distinctions from previous times. Military expert Martin VAN CREVELD analyzes this evolution, concluding that it is a process affecting all societies equally:

“As *war between states* exits through one side of history’s revolving door, *low-intensity conflict* among different organizations will enter through the other [...] *Who can point to a society* so isolated, so homogeneous, so rich, and so wallowing in its contentment as *to be in principle immune*? [...] Extensive conflict of this nature will cause *existing distinctions between government, armed forces, and people to break down*. National sovereignties are already being undermined by *organizations that refuse to recognize the state’s monopoly over armed violence*. Armies will be replaced by police-like security forces on the one hand and bands of ruffians on the other, not that the difference is always clear even today. *National frontiers*, that at present constitute perhaps the greatest single obstacle to combating low-intensity conflict, *may be obliterated* or else become meaningless as rival organizations chase each other across them. As frontiers go, so will territorial states [...] As new forms of armed conflict multiply and spread, they will cause the lines between public and private, government and people, military and civilian, to become as blurred as they were before 1648.” (VAN CREVELD, 1991: 224-5)

As a matter of fact, the proliferation of low-intensity conflicts has been an enduring trend already for decades: “The great majority of wars since 1945 have been Low Intensity Conflicts. In terms of both casualties suffered and political results achieved, these wars have been incomparably more important than any others” (VAN CREVELD

³. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, “war is generally understood to embrace only armed conflict on a fairly large scale, usually excluding conflicts in which fewer than 50,000 combatants are involved” (“Evolution of theories of war”).

1991: 25).

As we will see next, this conceptual evolution is gradually bringing the idea of war nearer to that of terrorism, the semantic boundaries between the two fading away more and more.

2.2. Terror. The search for a definition of terrorism

2.2.1. A plethora of definitions

In March 2005 (from the 8th to the 11th), exactly one year after the Madrid attacks on March 11th, 2004, the *International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security*, organized by the Club of Madrid, took place in the Spanish capital. One of the main recommendations contained in the resulting *Madrid Agenda* was the adoption of a definition of *terrorism*, specifically “the definition proposed by the United Nations High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in December 2004”.

The undertaking was by no means new. Attempts by the international community to reach such a definition go back as far as the 1920s and 1930s, in the context of the *International Conferences for the Unification of Penal Law* (LEVITT, quoted in GOLDER and WILLIAMS, 2004: 270). Such attempts have been often connected with work on multilateral conventions on terrorism. Already in 1937, the League of Nations first drafted a *Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism*, that never entered into force. The UN has likewise been drafting conventions against specific kinds of terrorism for the last forty years (now there are seventeen of them, plus two draft comprehensive conventions on terrorism, plus eight regional conventions), but has so far failed to include in them an explicit definition of the term, or to draft a comprehensive convention on the subject.

Not only international organizations have been trying to agree on a common definition, but also individual national governments in their national law, as well as legal and political practitioners and scholars. The resulting amount of different definitions is, understandably, staggering. As far back as 1988, scholars had counted as many as 109 different ones (SCHMID and JONGMAN, quoted in GOLDER and WILLIAMS, 2004: 270). As a matter of fact, even within a single country it appears difficult to have a single definition:

“In the United States federal system, each state determines what constitutes an offense under its domestic criminal or penal code. [...] The United States Congress has not been able to reach a consensus on a working definition of terrorism. The executive branch has also not developed a coordinated position on the meaning of the term.” (TIEFENBRUN, 2003: 367)

Nevertheless, even if it would seem that just about everybody is struggling to produce a definition of *terrorism*, there is no general consensus on whether such a definition is really necessary in the first place. Which might be one of the reasons why the endeavour has to date been in vain.

2.2.2. Is there really a need for a definition of *terrorism*?

There are plenty of words of very common usage, which have been tentatively defined many times, and yet which do not have a universally accepted definition; nor is the need really felt for one, since they are perfectly understood by speakers in everyday discourse. Those terms have a core meaning –shared by all speakers, thereby guaranteeing communication– and fuzzy semantic contours. The same can also be said of *terrorism*. Normal speakers in everyday discourse can talk about terrorism and basically understand each other. Nevertheless, if particular instances of the concept should be referred to, disagreements and hidden misunderstandings would certainly come up immediately. Speakers would then discover that, by focusing on individual cases, a world of nuances appears in which full agreement is almost impossible.

And yet, the situation is different if we leave everyday language and look at legal terminology. If a particular legal system intends to punish a certain behaviour, then the behaviour must be unequivocally identified in relation to others. That is to say, each term should ideally correspond to a single concept, and vice versa. So, the need for a definition of *terrorism* could be different in everyday speech and in the realm of legal terminology.

In recent times, the death toll of single terrorist attacks has experienced a dramatic increase, and the perpetrators' boldness has shocked and dismayed world leaders and public opinions alike. Such tragic instances of terrorism as September 11th, 2001, and March 11th, 2004, have left our societies with a burning urgency to act to prevent a recrudescence of terrorist acts.

Thus, there have been pressing calls for legal systems to reform and adapt to the new situation. On the one hand, it has been argued that terrorist acts can be covered by existing legal concepts, leaving aside terrorists' motivations and methods and focusing instead on the criminal dimension of the act. In this way, when perpetrated in a situation of peace, terrorism would be prosecuted under existing national and international criminal laws, just as any other crime. When perpetrated in war situations, it would be considered a war crime and fall under the Geneva Conventions.

This sceptical outlook is shared by some scholars and even by experienced judges such as Judge Rosalyn HIGGINS of the International Court of Justice:

“Terrorism is a term without any legal significance. It is merely a convenient way of alluding to activities, whether of States or of individuals, widely disapproved of and in which either the methods used are unlawful, or the targets protected, or both.”(quoted in GOLDER, 2004: 271)⁴

However, one of the dangers of not having a clear definition is that the term might

⁴. This amounts to considering the term terrorism as an empty one, as a mere semantic vehicle for stigma or disapproval, which acts just as a shell for the expression of a value judgement without any rational or objective components.

become an arbitrary label to be attached to whatever one dislikes or wants to stigmatize without being accountable for the actual content of the term used. On the other hand, this approach seems to get farther and farther away from public expectations. The current prevalence of terrorism has given rise to a perceived need to apply heavy punishment to these acts, and therefore to distinguish them clearly from other crimes:

“Today, it is clearly necessary to develop a coherent legal description of terrorism. [...] ‘Terrorism’ is now widely deployed in both political debate and legal discourse, and is referred to in an array of national and international legislative (and executive) regimes. [...] Today, the legal meaning attributed to terrorism [...] is crucial when establishing (and limiting) the scope of serious criminal sanctions as well as the capacity of the State to infringe upon accepted civil liberties, such as the right to privacy. Due to the serious legal, political, social, cultural and economic consequences of describing someone as a terrorist, or an action as terrorism, lawyers must seek to describe the concept with as much precision as possible. One danger is that if terrorism is not so defined, the powers of the State may extend very far indeed.” (GOLDER and WILLIAMS, 2004: 271-2)

And, finally, the absence of an internationally-agreed definition means that terrorism as such is not included in the statutes of existing international courts (ICTY, ICTR, ICC), thereby preventing them from adjudicating on such acts.

The United Nations is probably the body most committed to coming to a definition of *terrorism*. Secretary-General Kofi ANNAN recently made an appeal to this effect in the context of UN reform:

“...the moral authority of the United Nations and its strength in condemning terrorism have been hampered by the inability of Member States to agree on a comprehensive convention that includes a definition.” (ANNAN, 2005)

2.2.3. Why has it been impossible so far to agree on a definition?

Given the unquestionable social concern that recent acts of terrorism have stirred all over the world, as well as the long-term sustained efforts by the international community to reach consensus on a common definition of *terrorism* and on a comprehensive convention on this issue, its failure on both counts seems extremely paradoxical.

Scholars have tried to explain this. Steward and Woods, quoting Long, suggest that “the reason that there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism is that the nature of terrorism is continually changing”. This is undoubtedly one factor of difficulty, since terrorism is indeed evolving at great speed and any endeavour to grasp it in a sustainable fashion must be broad enough to take this evolution into account. Nonetheless, this reason does not seem enough to account for the present state of affairs.

Much more plausible seems the political dimension other writers have advanced as

an explanation: “‘What is terrorism?’ is a question of *politics* as much as law” (GOLDER and WILLIAMS, 2004: 293). Tiefenbrun expounds on this explanation, referring to the absence of definition as well as to the lack so far of a comprehensive convention:

“The absence of a universally-accepted *definition of terrorism* and the inapplicability of multilateral anti-terrorism legislation to state-sponsored terrorism reflect the *deeply political nature* of the term terrorism and the absence among nations of commonly shared values about the rule of law, the legitimacy of goals, and the means to achieve these goals. [...] “Due to the *political nature* of terrorism, states have not been able to reach an agreement on a *comprehensive convention* that would include all types of terrorist acts and that would be applicable to state-sponsored terrorism. Moreover, since terrorism has been committed in the past by many state actors during the time of war or revolution, *many states prefer to leave the definition of terrorism as vague as possible.*”” (TIEFENBRUN, 2003: 365 and 388)

One way of escaping the apparent inability to agree on a common definition has been to apply the specific or inductive approach (arguably less open to political manipulation), whereby terrorism is defined through the enumeration of particular acts: “According to this approach, international legal scholars have not attempted to define terrorism as a general concept per se, but rather have attempted to define (and proscribe) specific actions such as hijacking, the taking of hostages, and so forth. This can be contrasted with the general (or deductive) model, whereby the definer attempts to articulate a general concept of terrorism by reference to certain overarching criteria (such as, for example, intention or motivation)” (GOLDER, 2004: 273). Both approaches can sometimes be combined in the same instrument.

There was a first futile attempt at a generic definition by the League of Nations in 1937. But this and later attempts came to nothing. “For the majority of this time [...], international consensus on what constitutes terrorism has been frustrated by the divergent (and intractable) political positions of some states on questions such as whether the actions of the States themselves can be characterised as ‘terrorist’, and whether the violent actions of national liberation movements merit the label” (GOLDER, 2004: 273). The international community has thereafter been applying instead the specific approach in the several multilateral conventions adopted on the subject by the United Nations. These conventions each cover a particular instance of terrorist behaviour: hijacking of aircraft, taking of hostages, bombings etc. This method carries the disadvantage, amongst others, that the definition sticks to particular modes of terrorism and is therefore incapable of adapting to new modalities as they emerge. It is also unsatisfactory from an intellectual viewpoint. So, fresh attempts are being made at reaching a generic definition. This approach has been endorsed by the United Nations *High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* (UNITED NATIONS, 2004: 52), which puts forward the following text:

“description of terrorism as ‘any action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the *Geneva Conventions and Security Council* resolution 1566 (2004)⁵, that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act”’.

In much the same vein has the UN Secretary-General expressed himself at the Madrid Summit (ANNAN, 2005), explicitly endorsing the Panel’s recommendations, and such are as well the terms of the UN’s *Draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism*.

Given the current international situation, prospects for overcoming political discrepancies hindering the search for a common definition of *terrorism* could in principle be described as slim. And yet, recent moves by the United Nations seem to point a way forward, overcoming the reluctance of states at the –heavy– price of letting them “off the hook” (see § 2.2.4).

2.2.4. Wherever and by whoever? Agent

Any generic definition of *terrorism* would have to cover a series of semantic constituents (agent, target, purpose, means...), giving each of them a specific value. In section 2.4.5 we will go briefly into some of them. But let us first look at the one that seems to have been hindering attempts at a universal definition, namely, the agent.

Terrorism is usually conducted by sub-state groups possessing a whole range of organizational capacity. Isolated individuals are not frequent perpetrators of terrorist acts because of the complexity involved in organizing successful operations while avoiding capture. On the other hand, state terrorism as well as state-sponsored terrorism are well-known phenomena.

“Terrorism historically is the weapon of the weak” (HUNTINGTO, 1996: 187). The prevalence of sub-state groups as agents of terrorism is mainly due to their position of weakness in the balance of power, as seen in terms of material or human resources. According to the classic Weber’s definition, the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force is *the* defining feature of a state⁶. It is under this principle that states keep police forces and armies and are entitled to exert coercion and to wage war. In fact, when a state conducts or sponsors terrorism it is usually because it finds it convenient to hide behind anonymity in order to avoid accountability. Otherwise, it would use its army and be answerable before the attacked party or the international community.

⁵ As we can see, the specific approach is not entirely forgotten, since different modalities of terrorism are also implicitly included in the definition.

⁶ “A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (WEBER, M., “Politics as a Vocation”, speech delivered in 1918 [“Politik als Beruf”, *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*, München, 1921, pp. 396-450]).

As we have seen (§ 2.2.3), one of the main single reasons why the international community has so far failed to reach a consensus definition of *terrorism* has been fears by individual states that such a definition might one day backfire and be applied to them. Interestingly enough, the original concept of terrorism referred precisely to its state form. At a certain stage of the French Revolution (1793), the *Comité de Salut Public* adopted *terror* as state policy in order to cover executions of alleged traitors and collaborators, and so fend off royalist subversion and the menace of invasion. This period, which in fact amounted to a wave of state repression, came to be known as the *Reign of Terror* (SCHMID, 2004: 5).

The fact is that relevant multilateral conventions on terrorist acts apply only to individual actors, not states. And this is precisely the approach that seems to be making its way in the United Nations as it tries to draft a comprehensive convention on terrorism. After all, this organization is itself made up of member *states*. When we think of the way the United States has extracted itself from any obligations imposed by the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court, we should not be surprised at moves to relieve states of responsibility concerning the use of force in anything that could be construed as terrorist behaviour.

Thus, the present situation could be cleared if the emergent United Nations' official position was finally endorsed by its members. In a recent report, the *UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* made the following case for a convention that would exclude actions by states:

“Since 1945, an ever stronger set of norms and laws—including the Charter of the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court—has regulated and constrained States’ decisions to use force and their conduct in war [...]. The norms governing the use of force by non-State actors have not kept pace with those pertaining to States. This is not so much a legal question as a political one [...]. The United Nations must achieve the same degree of normative strength concerning non-State use of force as it has concerning State use of force.” (UNITED NATIONS, 2004: 51)

In this way, the UN is drawing a basic distinction that could leave its mark on the understanding of the concept *terrorism* in the future: *terrorism* would be associated to “non-State actors”, whereas state violence would be considered to be covered by other legal instruments. As recently as March 2005, Kofi ANNAN explicitly endorsed the Panel’s recommendations:

“It is time to set aside debates on so-called “State terrorism”. The use of force by States is already thoroughly regulated under international law. And the right to resist occupation must be understood in its true meaning. It cannot include the right to deliberately kill or maim civilians.” (UNITED NATIONS, 2005: 26)

If this approach were to be finally adopted, the resulting situation in international law could be represented through the following correlations:

Modality of use of force	Agent	Applicable legal instrument
war	state	UN Charter
		Geneva Conventions
		Rome Statute
terrorism	non-state	UN comprehensive convention

This would certainly be a major step as regards international consensus on a major contemporary challenge. Whether or not it would contribute to containing the worldwide spread of terrorism remains to be seen. What is certain, however, is that it would imply for the United Nations to go back on a number of previous pronouncements unequivocally condemning all instances of terrorism, “wherever and by whoever committed” (TIEFENBRUN, 2003: 384). Moreover, by excluding states from the legal scope of terrorism, the former idea of state-terrorism would formally disappear from international law. This could only be compensated for by a more stringent enforcement of international legal instruments on the conduct of war.

2.2.5. Definitions of *terrorism*. Other relevant semantic features.

As we have seen, definitions of *terrorism* are numerous. We will now review some other semantic constituents, besides the agent, that make up the concept of terrorism and should therefore be present in its definition. In this way, some of the challenges implicit in attempts to define the concept will also come to light.

Susan TIEFENBRUN (2003) reviews a number of definitions contained in national legal systems as well as in several multilateral conventions⁷. She suggests a set of semantic features that should be present in any proper definition of terrorism:

- 1) The **perpetration of violence** by whatever means;
- 2) The targeting of **innocent civilians**;
- 3) With the **intent** to cause violence or with wanton disregard for its consequences;
- 4) For the purpose of **causing fear, coercing or intimidating** an enemy;
- 5) In order to achieve some political, military, ethnic, ideological, or religious goal.” (TIEFENBRUN, 2003: 362)

It seems a good starting point. GOLDER and WILLIAMS suggest a definition of their own as a common denominator of a number of definitions they study. Tiefenbrun’s criteria are covered:

“political, religious or ideologically-motivated violence that causes harm to people or property, intended either to coerce a civilian population or government, or to instil fear in the population or a certain part of it.” (GOLDER and WILLIAMS, 2004: 289)

⁷. See the Annex for the full text of these and a sample of other relevant definitions.

And yet, they warn against a definition that would be too general and would inadvertently cover acts of mere advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action which would generally be considered legitimate because they are the expression of certain fundamental rights:

“However, if a definition is expressed at this level of abstraction [...] it would extend to [...] a range of activities not generally considered to be terrorism. Civil disobedience, public protest and industrial action are among the activities that could fall within the definition. These types of activities should be excluded from any definition of terrorism.” (GOLDER and WILLIAMS, 2004: 289)

In this way, the level of generality becomes a pre-semantic requirement for a proper definition of *terrorism*, that is to say, the definition has to encompass enough semantic characteristics for it to be “safe”. Or else, as it is the case sometimes, individual pieces of legislation would have to exclude explicitly these acts from their scope.

This is because one of the relevant semantic features of the concept, *PURPOSE*, is shared by those other legitimate concepts with which it might be confused with dangerous results. Advocacy, or the search for publicity in order to further a particular cause, is one of the purposes of terrorism. Another one, implicit in the word itself, is the arousal of fear or terror, aimed at intimidating either governments or populations. This is an intermediate objective, the ultimate one being coercing or forcing a government into taking a particular course of action.

The *TARGET* that comes up most often in definitions of terrorist acts is “innocent victims”. This is in itself a very ambiguous concept. It usually means persons not directly involved in the relevant conflict. But terrorists’ targets *are* often related somehow to the conflict, if only in the mind of the perpetrator, because they belong to one of the parties (a member of the military or the police force, for instance). Besides, the idea of *innocence* is too vague, especially if understood as opposed to *guilt* or *responsibility*. Perhaps it would be more to the point to speak about *indiscriminate* acts of violence, which can actually be directed against persons with no involvement whatsoever in the conflict.

MOTIVATION in terrorism is usually related to a cause, be it political, ideological, or religious. This sets terrorist acts apart from other common law crimes that are motivated by material gain. Terrorism is, as it were, “disinterested”, and for this reason individual terrorist acts are often considered legitimate by people more or less sympathetic to the relevant cause. Hence the already commonplace assertion that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” (apparently by President Reagan). Whether or not particular motivations can suffice to justify terrorist violence is an open debate far exceeding the scope of the present work.⁸

⁸. The United Nations (see quote about “the right to resist occupation” in section 2.2.4) is apparently intending not to take account of motivation when it comes to its blanket ban on terrorism.

The *MEANS* to achieve the purposes of terrorism is violence. This is also a vague concept the degree of which can make the difference between, for instance, mere vandalism and terrorism itself. It could be understood in this context as the use of force to either just intimidate, or to inflict material or personal harm (the latter often being a means to achieve the former).

Although this is usually disregarded in formal definitions, the number of victims is in normal perceptions also a distinguishing feature setting apart *terrorism* from *war*. In section 2.1 we have already seen the factor *SCALE* taken into account. But September 11th was a watershed also in this sense. With close to three thousand dead, it was the culmination of a steady rise in the death toll from terrorist acts witnessed in the last decades. We will see in section 2.3 some implications of this evolution.

One striking element in many definitions of terrorism is its qualification as *unlawful, proscribed, criminal*, etc. This does not seem technically very sound when one is trying to define a particular behaviour in order to ban it, since it amounts to including the ban itself (which is supposed to apply to the concept once defined) in the definition⁹. It is one more indication of problems involved in trying to define such an elusive concept. On closer inspection, *LEGITIMACY* (as opposed to *illegality*) is an essential semantic constituent in common perceptions of terrorism. As a matter of fact, the United Nations condemns (or is trying to) terrorism, but not necessarily war. Article 51 of its Charter provides for the right to individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a member¹⁰. On the other hand, when acts of violence are deemed legitimate, they are never called *terrorism*, but *insurgency, self-defence, resistance to occupation*, etc. But then, these forms of violence can very often be covered, just as any other armed conflict, by the Geneva Conventions. In which case, violation of the Conventions' rules would be deemed as a war crime¹¹. Thus, when TIEFENBRUN (2003: 362) asserts "normally the violence associated with terrorism is perpetrated without justification or without excuse", she overlooks the fact that the perpetrator will always claim to have both a justification and an excuse; it is ultimately a value judgement, and therefore subjective.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the official custodian of the *Geneva Conventions*, has issued some guidelines to facilitate their interpretation. It uses some of these and other criteria in order to make out war from other situations that could include terrorism:

⁹. One would have to know beforehand whether a particular act is unlawful in order to outlaw it, which seems a catch-22 situation.

¹⁰. The right of self-defence is not only recognized in the case of sovereign states: "The United Nations General Assembly's definition contained in its Resolution of 1991 has reappeared in several subsequent resolutions. This definition makes it clear that even though all people have certain rights—the right under racist regimes or alien domination to self-determination, the right to freedom and independence, and the right to struggle legitimately to achieve this end—notwithstanding these rights, peoples fighting against colonial domination may not resort to the acts proscribed in the antiterrorism conventions" (TIEFENBRUN, 2003: 384).

¹¹ Likewise, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court does not mention terrorism, but its definition of war crime (art. 3) could easily apply to it.

“One test that the ICRC suggests can help determine whether wartime or peacetime rules apply is to examine the *intensity* of hostilities [...] In addition [...], the ICRC suggests considering factors such as the *regularity* of armed clashes and the degree to which opposing forces are *organized*. Whether a conflict is *politically* motivated also seems to play an unacknowledged role in deciding whether it is a “war” or not. Thus organized crime or drug trafficking, although methodical and bloody, are generally understood to fall under law-enforcement rules, whereas armed rebellions, once sufficiently organized and violent, are usually seen as ‘wars’. The problem with these guidelines, however, is that they were written to address political conflicts rather than global terrorism. Thus they do not make it clear whether al Qaeda should be considered an organized criminal operation (which would not trigger the application of war rules) or a rebellion (which would)”. (ROTH, 2004)

2.3. A blurring distinction

In previous sections we have seen a series of indications about potential areas of overlap between the concepts of war and terrorism. This overlap is partially the result of a conceptual evolution affecting particularly the idea of war, whereby it is gradually losing its former distinguishing semantic features and taking on others that were traditionally associated with the concept of terrorism.

However, it is also clear that war and terrorism were never fully independent concepts. In this sense, it is useful to represent this semantic field as a continuum instead as a dichotomy. SCHMID (2004: 3) calls this continuum the “spectrum of political action”, representing it as a crescendo in the following stages: *conventional politics–unconventional politics–violent politics–state of war*. The second stage, *violent politics*, includes terrorism and guerrilla warfare. As a matter of fact, guerrilla has often been seen as an intermediary stage between terrorism and war, therefore sharing some semantic features with both. Guerrilla often covers, then, that fuzzy area of overlap signalling the convergence of the concepts of war and terrorism. Some authors¹² have analyzed this and tried to establish the relevant semantic boundaries. Crozier pictures a crescendo between these three ideas, mentioning insurrection as a concrete instance: “Whatever the country or the circumstances, insurrection tends to follow a sequence of three phases: terrorism, guerrilla warfare and full-scale war”.

However, this historic overlap seems now to be expanding into the semantic areas that were formerly the exclusive domain of one of them, the three concepts slowly collapsing into a larger, more vague one. This would go a long way to explain a number of paradoxes and perplexities arising nowadays from this increasingly confused area of meaning. Let us mention as an example two distinguishing semantic features, the agent and the scale, that are losing sharpness:

¹². See SCHMID (2004: 10-12) for a summary of the views of authors like Rapoport, Merari and Crozier.

“In the future, war will not be waged by armies but by groups whom we today call terrorists, guerrillas, bandits, and robbers, but who will undoubtedly hit on more formal titles to describe themselves.” (VAN CREVELD, 1991: 197)

“In the past, terrorists could do only *limited violence*, killing a few people here or destroying a facility there. Massive military forces were required to do massive violence. At some point, however, *a few terrorists will be able to produce massive violence* and massive destruction.” (HUNTINGTON, 1996: 187-8)

And September 11th, with close to three thousand mortal victims, has been a watershed in this process:

“September 11th, 2001, signalled a new age of terrorism, which also requires new ways of thinking it and of fighting it. With the *disappearance of limits and borders*, the traditional category of crime is also disappearing [...]. Hence, the first debate was about whether we were dealing with *a war or a terrorist act*. Simulations of a traditional war (Afghanistan, Iraq) were conducted without wanting to acknowledge that *the enemy is in the home front and that he must be fought differently* [...] The attempt to *lay responsibility on particular states* reflects a *traditional militaristic way of thinking*, whereas we might have entered a situation of “individualisation of war” (BECK, 2002: 34), in which it is not states which confront each other, but instead *individuals* [...] *declare war on states* [...] In any case, *confrontation is no longer territorial*. Ultimately, we lack an enemy with an assigned status as a political subject [...] In the immediate future we will not be allowed to find consolation in traditional schemes that used to help combat confusion. We will witness *conflicts with no uniforms*, with scattered explosions and sinister methods of destruction, without signs on maps like those shown by battlefronts, with *strategies designed to cause fear rather than casualties*. Martin van Creveld (1991 and 1999) has seen in all this a metamorphosis going beyond the military dimension: the *end of the modern state's age*, of recognizable sovereignty, of the monopoly of force and of guaranteed security.” (INNERARITY, 2004: 76-8)

And yet, in the midst of this growing confusion, and while acknowledging the difficulties involved in deciding when to apply war rules, some criteria have been advanced to that effect:

“The best way to determine if war rules should apply would be through a three-part test. To invoke war rules, Washington should have to prove, first, that an *organized group* is directing *repeated acts of violence* against the United States, its citizens, or its interests with *sufficient intensity* that it can be fairly recognized as an armed conflict; second, that the suspect is an *active member of an opposing armed force* or is an active participant in the violence; and, third, that *law enforcement means are unavailable*.” (ROTH, 2004)

3. A semantic axis articulating political discourse after September 11th

Since September 11th, 2001, the *war on terror* has been a permanent fixture in the American public discourse. Hardly a week has gone by without President Bush making it the main subject, or at least a substantial component, of his weekly radio address to the nation (the main bulk of the texts analyzed here), whereas, on the other hand, in the months leading up to the attacks in 2001, only one such address had been on a related topic—national security⁹.

The public discourse of the Bush administration has largely conformed to a certain structural, logical and lexical pattern that was set very early after the attacks. Soon after his return to Washington on the very day of the tragedy, in an address from the Oval Office (OO 11.9), President Bush already talked of “the war against terrorism”. On the day after, in a speech following a Cabinet meeting (CR 12.9) he laid out the main themes of this discourse which he consolidated and developed, on September 20th, in an address before a joint session of Congress (JSC 20.9).

A remarkable feature of this pattern is its regularity. After a few hesitations at the beginning, and with very few variations, it amounts to a standard model recurring again and again, only to be complemented with different thematic additions according to the particular juncture. This standard pattern of discourse is configured by a series of thematic building blocks spinning off from the main axis, war/terror, and could be outlined as follows:

The United States has been attacked
 The United States must respond with determination
 This is a formal war
 This war is a universal struggle of good against evil
 War involves a state of exception calling for flexibility
 War requires unity
 The United States is not alone in this war
 The war will be long. Its objectives are clear
 The United States is still threatened
 Security is an absolute policy priority
 There are historical precedents to this situation.

In the following sections, we will look more closely into the way these building blocks actually function in the texts, paying particular attention to the two main articulating concepts, war and terror¹⁰. But, before that, let us begin by outlining a number of general features of President Bush’s discourse¹¹.

¹³. On that occasion, interestingly enough, President Bush had stated a concern about terrorist attacks on the United States, only he failed to anticipate the right kind of threat: “we must make sure our country, itself, is protected from attack from ballistic missiles and high-tech terrorists” (RA 10.2.2001).

¹⁴. In order to avoid an overload of data, in the case of very brief quotations, such as isolated expressions or words, we will dispense with references. Emphasis is ours in all cases.

¹⁵. For the theoretical remarks on political speech we draw mainly on the work by FERNÁNDEZ LAGUNILLA (1999).

First of all, we have to bear in mind the audience. Nowadays, political messages are almost systematically directed to every citizen, even when taking place directly before more limited audiences, as is the case with the State of the Union Address (before Congress, in Washington). The omnipresence of the mass media means that, in any case, the indirect audience –and this, in the language of politics usually means voters– is always considerably larger. Radio addresses, moreover, are specifically intended to reach this wider audience. What this means is that the discourse can never be too technical, too elaborate, in short, too high-brow for the general public.

This leads to a second striking feature, the sheer simplicity of the discourse. As we will see, this shows in the reiteration of subjects and words, in the extreme simplicity of arguments, and in a Manichean worldview totally lacking in nuance or qualification.

Political discourse is by definition not informative or neutral, but rather emotive and meant to inspire, stir and influence. A third feature is, thus, the use of connotation over denotation, that is, the reliance on terms that arouse feelings because of their positive or negative value, instead of terms that communicate conceptual information in a rational way. The aim is to move, not to convince. This is particularly the case in the analyzed addresses, intended to instill certain feelings and to rally support in a critical situation. And this is why they are so subjectively loaded, full of laudatory or else derogatory terms.

3.1. The attack

“America was attacked.” (SoUA 2002)

The deliberate crashing of planes into the World Trade Center in New York came, first of all, as a tremendous blow for the American people. In President Bush’s addresses the attack is described as a *national tragedy*, a *great national loss*, *great harm*, as an event that changed history: “The terrorist attacks on September the 11th were a *turning point* for our nation” (RA 11.9.2004).

There are several reasons for this. First, the number of victims and the savagery of the act. But even this would not explain by itself the intensity of the resulting feelings. The shock came also from the realization that the country could be caught by surprise, that its historic sense of invulnerability – coming from its size and from the continental nature of its geographical makeup – had been challenged beyond recovery. This idea can be found very explicitly in President Bush’s addresses:

“Americans have known wars – but for the past 136 years, they have been *wars on foreign soil...*” (JSC 20.9)

“Our nation has been put on notice: *We’re not immune from attack.*” (JSC 20.9)

“America is *no longer protected* by vast oceans” (SoUA 2002)

“America has gone from a *sense of invulnerability* to an *awareness of peril.*” (SoUA 2003)

Moreover, the awareness of vulnerability is inversely proportional to the sophistication of the means employed. On September 11th, havoc was caused just by “box cutters, mace and 19 airline tickets” (RA 14.2.2004). Old criteria for assessing risk are no longer valid:

“Enemies in the past needed *great armies and great industrial capabilities* to endanger America. Now, *shadowy networks of individuals* can bring great chaos and suffering *to our shores* for less than it costs to purchase a single tank.” (NSS 2002)

3.2. The response

“America will stay *focused* and *determined*, and *we will prevail*.” (RA 28.8.2004)

Although one of the elements of the initial reaction to the attacks was shock and bewilderment, the attending paralysis was short-lived. The Bush administration immediately tried to instill into people a sense of urgency that would translate into swift and confident action. The American people must above all be determined; this was driven home with great emphasis:

“America is *ready*; the *morale* of our military is *high*; the *will* of our people is *strong*. We are *determined*, we are *steadfast*...” (RA 20.4.2002)

“...we can be *confident*. In a whirlwind of change and hope and peril, our faith is *sure*, our *resolve* is *firm*, and our union is *strong*.” (SoUA 2003)

“There will be *no flinching* in this war on terror, and there will be *no retreat* [...] This campaign requires sacrifice, *determination* and *resolve*, and we will *see it through*.” (RA 23.8.2003)

A determination that should not falter until the end, and this end could be nothing else than assured victory. In fact, one very frequent appendage to sentences in President Bush’s speeches is “*and we will prevail*”. Until this final victory, he endeavours to warn against what he sees as a premature retreat: “*We can’t stop* short. If we stop now [...] our sense of security would be *false and temporary*” (SoUA 2002).

The resolve Bush demands will show not only in terms of perseverance, but also in the concrete resources that will go into the response. Here we see signs of a maximalism which will emerge in the same way when it comes to defining the aims of the war on terror. Namely, it will not be a cosmetic response: “Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes” (JSC 20.9), but an all-out war: “We will direct *every* resource at our command—*every* means of diplomacy, *every* tool of intelligence, *every* instrument of law enforcement, *every* financial influence, and *every* necessary weapon of war— to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network” (JSC 20.9).

3.2.1. Preemption

“We’re staying *on the offensive*, striking the terrorists *abroad* so we do not have to face them *here at home*.” (RA 18.9.2004)

A further fundamental aspect of the response that is somehow related to these calls for resolve and determination, has been the preemptive policy adopted by the United States administration in response to the attacks. This has been the object of much controversy and we will comment on it in further detail in part IV.

Even if the concept of preemption seems to hinge on a time dimension, time is not its only constituent, and this plays a fundamental role as we will see. In the case of the war on terror, striking the enemy *before* (time) he hits us implies striking him *wherever* (space) he may be. Moreover, since he is in general not within our borders, we must cross them to pursue him. The interplay of these two dimensions can be seen in the following quotations. The first group uses preemption in the time sense. The second one uses it in the space sense. And the third one combines both¹⁶:

“We protect our country by [...] *assessing and anticipating* our vulnerabilities, and *acting quickly* to address those vulnerabilities and *prevent* attacks.” (RA 7.9.2002)

“America will confront gathering dangers *early*. By showing our resolve *today*, we are building a *future* of peace.” (RA 7.12.2002)

“*In Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere*, our military is confronting the terrorist enemy so we don’t meet that enemy *in our own country*.” (RA 29.11.2003)

“...wars are not won *on the defensive*. The best way to keep America safe from terrorism is to *go after terrorists* where they plan and hide. And that work goes on *around the world*.” (RA 16.11.2002)

“the best way to *prevent future attacks* is to *go after the enemy*.” (RA 30.10.2004)

“We will *not wait to see* what terrorists or terror states could do with weapons of mass destruction. We are determined to confront threats *wherever they arise*.” (RA 8.3.2003)

3.2.1.1. Legal and strategic justification

The US National Security Strategy (February 2002) provides the rationale for the principle of foreign intervention based on preemption.

Globalisation means, amongst many other things, the blurring of national borders as they were previously understood: “Today, the *distinction between domestic and foreign affairs* is diminishing. In a globalized world, events beyond America’s borders have a greater impact inside them” (NSS 2002). And this includes the enemy’s ability to completely disregard American borders while carrying out the attacks. This gives the United States implicitly the right to cross these same borders in order to respond. Foreign intervention is given as a basic strategic option: “The U.S. national security strategy will be based on a distinctly American *internationalism*” (NSS 2002).

¹⁶. The last of these quotations is particularly interesting, as it provides the justification for invading Iraq before the completion of technical verifications on the existence of weapons of mass destruction.

Grounds are given for the adoption of this approach. First, the failure of strategies used in recent times: “It has taken almost a decade for us to comprehend the true nature of this new threat [...] the United States can *no longer* solely rely on a *reactive posture* as we have in the past [...] *We cannot let our enemies strike first*” (NSS 2002, p. 15) and, more specifically, during the Cold War: “In the Cold War [...] Deterrence was an effective defense [...] Traditional concepts of *deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy* whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents; whose so-called soldiers seek martyrdom in death and whose most potent protection is statelessness” (NSS 2002, p. 15).

Second, an international legal basis that would nevertheless have to undergo adjustment to present circumstances: “For centuries, international law recognized that nations *need not suffer an attack before* they can lawfully *take action to defend themselves* against forces that present an *imminent danger* of attack. Legal scholars and international jurists often conditioned the *legitimacy of preemption* on the *existence of an imminent threat* – most often a visible mobilization of armies, navies, and air forces preparing to attack [...] We must adapt the concept of *imminent threat*” (NSS 2002, p. 15).

And so is the principle of preemption described in practical terms: “defending the United States [...] by identifying and destroying the threat *before it reaches our borders* [...] to exercise our right of self-defense by *acting preemptively* against such terrorists” (NSS 2002, p. 6).

The risk of such an approach is, obviously, the United States becoming an unrestrained global power that sees the world as its theatre of operations. To allay such fears, the chapter closes with a statement of good intentions that subsequently gave rise to the recurrent assurances we have seen (see section 3.8) on the part of President Bush about the aims of foreign intervention: “The purpose of our actions will always be to eliminate a *specific threat* [...] The *reasons* for our actions will be *clear*, the *force measured*, and the *cause just*” (NSS 2002, p. 16).

3.3. A formal war

3.3.1. The attack equals a declaration of war

“The terrorists and their supporters *declared war on the United States*, and *war is what they got*.” (SoUA 2004)

Even a proactive, determined attitude in the response to the attacks would not necessarily have meant launching a military offensive. Other options were open: a diplomatic offensive, or alternatively a law enforcement one. Yet, the Bush administration chose to construe as an act of war what in fact was a terror act. Sometimes the equation is explicit: “The deliberate and deadly attacks [...] were *more than acts of terror*. They were *acts of war*” (CR 12.9). Other times, the state of war is presented as a *fait accompli*: “The terrorists have *declared war* on every free nation and all our citizens” (RA 23.8.2003), “America is on the offensive against the terrorists

who *started this war*” (SoUA 2004).

In order to sustain the argument, the attack on the Twin Towers is openly compared to a traumatic historical event, the bombing of the United States fleet in Pearl Harbor: “Twice in six decades, a *sudden attack* on the United States launched our country into a global conflict [...] The *bombing of Pearl Harbor* taught America that unopposed tyranny, even on far-away continents, could draw our country into a *struggle for our own survival*” (NDU 2005). Yet, Pearl Harbor was an act of military aggression perpetrated by a regular army belonging to a sovereign state, against another army from another sovereign state. By equalling it to an aggression by an undetermined enemy without a known national allegiance, the semantic boundaries between *terrorism* and *war* become obscured.

3.3.2. The response will be formal war

“As we gather tonight, our nation is at war.” (SoUA 2002)

Normally, states respond to terrorist acts with law enforcement measures, police prevention or cooperation with states from which threats might be coming (e.g.: Spain and France on ETA). The United States administration also did this, but not only. Whilst the attacks on September 11th were treated from the start as an act of war, the anthrax episodes that took place soon after were considered as terrorist acts. The terms used to refer to them (*crime, guilty, solve, punish*) belong to the vocabulary of police work, not to military terminology: “anyone who would try to infect other people with anthrax is guilty of an *act of terror*. We will solve these *crimes*, and we will punish those responsible” (RA 3.11.2001).

Nevertheless, the attacks on the Twin Towers are a different matter altogether. In a couple of instances Bush establishes a parallelism between crime and terrorism as between two different domains: “Al Qaeda is to *terror* what the mafia is to *crime*” (JSC 20.9); “If these methods are good for hunting *criminals*, they are even more important for hunting *terrorists*” (SoUA 2004).

During the electoral campaign for the 2004 elections, President Bush uses his radio address to defend his agenda and criticize his opponent, John Kerry. One of the subjects is precisely the different approach both take to terrorism prevention: “[Senator Kerry] says the war on terror is “primarily an *intelligence* and *law enforcement operation*” (RA 30.10.2004). Given the aggressive mood of the whole address, this statement of a divergence of views amounts very clearly to a radical dismissal of the law enforcement approach. Some time before, at that year’s State of the Union address, President Bush had tried to give a reasoned explanation of his views in this respect. It is one of the very rare instances of an attempt to argue his case in a rational way:

“I know that some people question if America is really in a war at all. They view *terrorism more as a crime*, a problem to be solved mainly with *law enforcement and indictments*. After the World Trade Center was first attacked

in 1993, some of the guilty were indicted and tried and convicted, and sent to prison. But the matter was not settled. [...] After the chaos and carnage of September the 11th, *it is not enough* to serve our enemies with legal papers. The terrorists and their supporters *declared war on the United States*, and *war is what they got*.” (SoUA 2004)

But, to be sure, even if the situation is labelled as a war, there are so many open questions and doubts that he has to acknowledge it is not a war like previous ones: “Two-and-a-half years ago, on a clear September morning, the enemies of America brought *a new kind of war* to our shores” (RA 21.2.2004).

3.3.3. The war on terror

“Our nation is fighting a continuing *war on terror*.” (RA 6.11.2004)

This expression has come to encapsulate the main theme of the Bush presidency. It contains the two main concepts that, combined, have served as a basis and a justification for many policy decisions. For that reason, it has become the administration’s slogan and has been largely relayed by the media, which has contributed to its becoming an essential part of the American people’s mental representations.

Soon after his return to Washington on the very day of the tragedy, President Bush already talked of “the war against terrorism” in an address from the Oval Office (OO 11.9): “...we stand together to win *the war against terrorism*” (OO 11.9). It was early moments after the tragedy and, needless to say, no military operations had been announced yet. The use of the definite article *the* with the noun *war* was not referring to a concrete reality, but rather to an abstract notion expressed by a metaphor, meaning *countering*, *fight*, *struggle* (in the same way as it is often said “the fight against AIDS”)¹⁷. The final formulation of the slogan had not yet been set. Likewise, it still was *terrorism* and not *terror*.

Already next day, however, *war* had started to take on more definite contours as a literal description of the state of affairs: “...we will not allow this enemy to win the *war* by changing our way of life...” (CR 12.9). And so, for some time after the attacks, some vacillation can be observed in President Bush’s addresses as to the label to attach to the upcoming operation. Concretely, there is a certain range of different terms that come to constitute an evolving expression. These terms are not synonyms, but they are quite closely related. For instance, four days after the attacks the term *war* was still absent from the discourse: “we plan a comprehensive *assault on terrorism*. This will be a different kind of *conflict* against a different kind of enemy” (RA 15.9.2001). An actual war response seemed, moreover, to have been excluded, even if the enemy had started one; even so, a war vocabulary starts making its way into the discourse:

¹⁷. As late as 2004, President Bush referred to this possible metaphoric use to deny it, even if by then the literal sense in which it had been employed had become abundantly clear: “The war on terror is not a figure of speech” (RA 20.3.2004).

“This is a *conflict* without *battlefields* or *beachheads*, a *conflict* with *opponents* who believe they are invisible [...] Those who *make war* against the United States have chosen their own destruction. *Victory* against terrorism will not take place in a single *battle*, but in a series of decisive *actions* against terrorist organizations and those who harbor and support them. We are planning a broad and sustained *campaign* to secure our country and eradicate the evil of terrorism.” (RA 15.9.2001)

To be sure, very soon the “battlefields and beachheads” have returned to the discourse, only they are not denied anymore but, on the contrary, stressed: “our *war on terror* will be much broader than the *battlefields* and *beachheads* of the past. This *war* will be fought wherever terrorists hide, or run, or plan [...] *Our weapons are military and diplomatic, financial and legal*. And in this *struggle* [...] We did not seek this *conflict*...” (RA 29.9.2001). This is probably a watershed text. The tone sounds decidedly warlike and the military element is openly mentioned.

From now on, even if terms like *struggle*, *campaign*, *fight* or *battle* do come up occasionally, the overwhelming majority of references are explicitly to *war*. All along, the choice of *war* as a term as well as a course of action generates the related war rhetoric and vocabulary, with terms such as *conquer*, *enemy*, *battle*, *threats*, *win*, *lose*, *battlefield* etc, scattered over the texts.

As for the other components of the formula, *terror* alternates very rarely with *terrorism*, or even *global terrorism*. And the nexus is the preposition *on*, except for a few occurrences of *against*: “they will make us proud in the *struggle against terrorism*” (RA 29.9.2001); “...as the *war against terrorism* moves forward” (RA 29.9.2001); “I want to update Americans on our *global campaign against terror*” (RA 6.10.2001).

The reason why *terror* is finally chosen over its doublet *terrorism* for the formula *war on terror* deserves some reflexion. The term *terrorism* belongs, on account of the suffix -ism (and its derivative -ist), to the general language of politics. It is therefore marked by a more neutral tone, as happens with words of the scientific-technical realm. *Terror*, on the other hand, is a word from the general vocabulary, free from political connotations (although it was the originary term for *terrorism*) and much more primary; it therefore appeals better to the innermost feelings and perceptions of common people. It is, therefore, much easier to transform into an emotive keyword, the semantic content of which becomes much less important than the connotations (negative in this case) it suggests and the subjective emotions it arouses¹⁸.

¹⁸. In fact, the term “terrorism” appeared, already during the French Reign of Terror, in order to introduce a negative value judgement into the officially adopted “terror”. The context was a reaction of Robespierre’s former allies and now victims of state repression: “They could not accuse him of ‘terreur’ since they had earlier declared terror to be official state policy; hence they accused Robespierre of ‘terrorisme’, a word which had an illegal and repulsive ring” (SCHMID, 2004: 5). Robespierre was sent to the guillotine on this charge and the word terrorism spread throughout Europe.

In this context, the denotative meaning of the word, its bare semantic meaning, is sidelined. Thus, in President Bush's speeches there is no room for traditional international qualms about the definition of *terrorism*. The strong emotional load of the term makes it possible to almost dispense with its proper semantic content. The general public considers *terrorism* a self-defined term, therefore President Bush does not even (or very rarely) try to define or describe *terrorism*, he only qualifies it with derogatory adjectives. Let us, however, see the very few cases in which such a description is outlined. They refer to the anthrax episodes, which were treated differently from the September 11th attacks; more generally, they also refer to the exclusion of political alibis as a justification for terrorism:

“anyone who deliberately delivers anthrax is engaged in a crime and an act of terror, a hateful attempt to *harm innocent people* and *frighten our citizens*.” (RA 20.10.2001)

“We expect nations to oppose *all terrorists*, *not just some of them*. No *political* cause can justify the *deliberate murder of civilians*. There is no such thing as a good terrorist.” (RA 10.11.2001)

“The enemy is terrorism – premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents [...] Such grievances deserve to be, and must be, addressed within a political process. But no cause justifies terror.” (NSS 2002)

“a *murderer* is not a *martyr*; he or she is just a *murderer*” (RA 20.4.2002).

The structure of the formula *war on terror* reflects a frequent procedure in the language of politics, namely the combination of pairs of words carrying an opposite judgment value (positive/negative). Although it cannot be said that the term *war* carries exactly a positive connotation, in the conceptual spectrum of political violence, *war* and *terrorism* occupy opposite positions in terms of the added notion of *legitimacy*¹⁹. The implications of this polar structure for the semantic axis *war/terror* will become clear in section 2.4. Let us just mention here that each of the two poles is identified with one of both opposed camps: *we* make *war* against *them*, the *terrorists*. Of course, this distinction is not sustainable. If war is legitimate but terrorism is not, by qualifying as war the response to September 11th the quality of legitimacy gets automatically transferred to the other side as well. This, in fact, raised some criticism: “Calling this a war suggests that these terrorists are warriors”²⁰.

The resulting slogan, *war on terror*, conveniently simple and compact, appears in nearly every address by President Bush. On each occasion, nevertheless, it is not overwhelmingly frequent. We usually see it once in every speech, sometimes twice

¹⁹. FERNÁNDEZ LAGUNILLA, referring to the Spanish political context, makes a reflexion that can easily be generalized to the present international scene: “Whereas the negative word par excellence in political speech is demagogu [...] words carrying a negative meaning in the present political discourse (contrary to the positive one peace) [...] revolve around the ideas of terrorism and violence” (FERNÁNDEZ LAGUNILLA, 1999b: 29).

²⁰. Charles Kennedy, leader of the Liberal Democrats (UK), addressing the party conference on 21.3.04.

and very rarely three times: “As they continue to fight the *war on terror* in lands far from home...” (RA 14.6.2003); “Tomorrow the world will witness [...] a crucial advance in the *war on terror*” (RA 29.1.2005).

In this relative proliferation, *war on terror* functions as any other political slogan. As in the language of advertising, what matters more with political slogans is not so much their content as their reiteration in speech. The intended message is hammered home through repetition. What is more, this sheer repetition confers on the discourse a particular feel going beyond pure semantics. In the case of *war on terror*, and more specifically of the word *terror*, it is clearly the creation of an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, the very same thing the war on terror is supposed to fight.

The slogan is, according to CASALS (2002) terminology, an *objectivizing appellation* or *conceptual object*. These are logical constructs without any real existence. They are created “in order to lend strength to an expressed opinion”, “to serve a power or ideology” (CASALS, 2002: 138-9). “With this appeal, any explanations become unnecessary, since it creates an object. [...] it is the old method of bringing something into being just by naming it [...] They are always very striking, inciting the receiver of the message to instant adhesion [...] They function as ideological labels” (CASALS, 2002: 139). Thus, with the expression *war on terror*, President Bush gives birth to a reality that becomes a *fait accompli*, aimed at achieving an uncritical closing of ranks behind his policies. Because the main function of conceptual objects is “avoiding reflective thought and, above all, questions” (CASALS, 2002: 140).

3.4. The two camps: we/they

It is probably the case that any war situation involves a rhetoric of polarization. The enemy is represented as intrinsically bad and one’s own camp as victims or heroes, or both. In the case of the United States’ foreign policy in the wake of September 11th, this rhetoric has reached an unprecedented virulence, if only because of the extremely simplistic reasoning underlying it.

Creating an adversary and, at the same time, an ally is acknowledged as one of the distinguishing features of political speech. It has been said that, when there is no adversary, one has to be made up. Now, whether finding an adversary was a precondition for the setting of a war situation, or whether war was the opportunity to find an opponent, would be an interesting point of debate. In part IV we will try to go a bit further into this. For now, let us analyze this conceptual dichotomy as we find it in the texts.

3.4.1. Good versus evil

“Three years ago, the *struggle of good against evil* was compressed into a single morning.” (RA 11.9.2004)

The way the stakes in this war are presented could not be more radical: the two forces at play are none less than *good* and *evil*. This, as so many messages in President

Bush's addresses, is conveyed in strikingly explicit terms: "This will be a monumental struggle of *good versus evil*, but good will prevail" (CR 12.9). In this Manichean scenario, of course, each opponent is not the abstract entities *good* and *evil*, but their embodiment. And here starts the characterization of both camps, as *we* is always associated with *good*: "This nation is confronting a terrible *evil*, and we are overcoming *evil* with *good*" (RA 6.7.2002); "our country has shown the strength of its character by responding to *acts of evil* with *acts of good*" (RA 31.8.2002). This translates into more concrete character features: "The *contrast could not be greater* between the *honorable conduct* of our liberating force and the *criminal acts* of the enemy" (RA 29.3.2003).

There is a parallel, similar opposition between two principles that could be seen as the political manifestation of the forces of good and evil: *freedom* and *fear*: "*Freedom and fear are at war*" (JSC 20.9); "the forces of *terror* cannot stop the momentum of *freedom*" (SoUA 2002). It is in the shape of this opposition that President Bush refers to God as taking the United States side in this war. Even if he often mentions God towards the end of his speeches, he usually does so in the form of a plea for divine support. In the present case, though, he takes for granted such support: "*Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them*" (JSC 20.9). This is redolent of the rhetoric of the Crusades, although post-9/11 public discourse in the United States has largely refrained from referring explicitly to holy wars and crusades.

3.4.2. Taking sides

"Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. *Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.*" (JSC 20.9)

The adopted Manichean approach means that everything is seen as good or evil, black or white, excluding shades of grey. Thus, the cleavage between the two camps applies to everybody, all other possible nuances being radically excluded²¹: "In the struggle between terrorist killers and peaceful nations, *there is no neutral ground*" (RA 27.9.2003). Which means that every nation has to take one or the other side. And injunctions to do that come even with threats attached: "The United States is presenting a *clear choice* to every nation: *Stand with the civilized world, or stand with the terrorists*. And for those nations that stand with the terrorists, there will be a *heavy price*" (RA 6.10.2001).

3.4.3. We

"By our actions in this war, we serve a great and *just cause*." (RA 5.4.2003)

²¹. This idea is a classical representation of the problem of terrorism: "we must draw a clear line between barbarism and peace, between the rule of terror and the rule of law. Either we are on the side of barbarism, or we are on the side of civilization" (Prime Minister Aznar, parliamentary debate on the state of the nation, 12.5.1998, quoted in FERNÁNDEZ LAGUNILLA 1999a: 63).

President Bush plays his role –as elected leader of the nation and Commander in Chief of its armed forces– in trying to instill into the citizens a sense of community in times of war. We will develop this further in section 3.6, but let us look for now at the way language procedures are used to construct this *we* as one of the poles in the dichotomy.

Firstly, there is a continuous use of plural or collective nouns representing the social and institutional community that underlies the United States, thereby highlighting the belonging to a politically organized society, sometimes with the attached national adjective: *citizens, our people, the American people, Americans, fellow Americans...* Also very frequently, the idea of political community is given through nouns denoting the political entity itself: *America, the United States, this country, the nation...* These terms are often reinforced by the use of possessive adjectives in the first person: *our country, our nation, our Union, my fellow citizens, my fellow Americans...*; some other times, the collective noun is associated with positive qualities, in the same laudatory vein we have seen in section 3.4.1: *a great people, a great nation, this good nation...*

Secondly, a morphological procedure, the use of pronouns in the first person plural, with the same meaning of a sense of community: *we, our, us*. This is one more procedure typical of the language of politics. The speaker seeks thereby to identify himself with the audience as members of a politically organized group. The referent of this pronouns varies, from the United States government (to which the President belongs) to the community of the American people (to which he belongs as well). By using *we*, Bush can play with different belongings and groupings according to the situation, always showing public, not personal, concern.

The first person singular is also used sometimes. Namely, in two different circumstances. One is when President Bush wants to present himself in his personal capacity as the nation's leader: "*I ask the American people to join me...*" (BAFB 11.9). The second is when he wants to distance himself from the actions of Congress because they are not in accordance with his own views: "*I was disappointed by the failure of the Senate to act on my proposals [...] I outlined these proposals in October [...] My ideas passed the House of Representatives [...] But the Senate would not schedule them for a vote*" (RA 29.12.2001).

In the radical dichotomy of good against evil, we have seen that good is equated with *us*, on the one hand, and with the idea of *freedom* on the other hand. Logically, therefore, the association between *we* and *freedom* is also bound to occur. The United States is presented as a *definitional* equivalent of freedom or liberty, through a relation of identification: "*Freedom itself was attacked this morning*" (BAFB 11.9), "*In this land of liberty [...] [...] freedom has had a home and a defender*" (RA 6.7.2002).

The quintessential association between *we* and *good*, finally, has another set of expressions that implicitly serve to justify the war by reference to the traditional idea

of *just war*. As we can see, justice is considered by national doctrine (the National Security Strategy) as a pre-requisite to launch a preemptive war: “The *reasons* for our actions will be *clear* [...], and the *cause just*” (NSS 2002, p. 16). Therefore, going into war presupposes the justness of the cause: “We’ll meet violence with patient justice – assured of the *rightness of our cause*” (JSC 20.9).

As a matter of fact, this approach could be meant to fit into classical just war theory, developed amongst others by Aquinas. The requirements of a just war would be: “that hostilities be used in support of a just cause, that support of that just cause in fact be the reason for going to war, and that the war be waged under the legitimate authority of the state” (*Summa Theologica*, quoted in LOWE, 2003: 47). But then, “the tradition [...] usually includes three further conditions [...]: that war not be started except as a last resort, that war not be started except when there is a reasonable probability that it will accomplish its goal, and that the good gained by engaging in warfare is proportional to the likely pain, suffering and evils that result from doing so” (LOWE, 2003: 47). This is precisely an encapsulation of the main criticism the Iraq war has received.

3.4.4. They

“For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in *resentment* and *tyranny* [...] *violence* will gather, and multiply in *destructive power* [...] and raise a *mortal threat*.” (IA 2005)

Not surprisingly, the enemy (*they*) is presented in a totally negative light, associated with derogatory terms: *a faceless coward, deadly, evil²², despicable, murderers, dictators, brutalizers, repressors, traitors to their own faith, killers, radical, hateful, follow in the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism, dangerous killers, murderers, ticking time bombs, parasites, tyranny, death, cruelty, thug...*

The enemy not only epitomizes all that is bad, but is sometimes presented under animal-like features; he *hides in caves and mountains*, and has to be *hunted down*: “American people need to know we’re facing a different enemy than we have ever faced. This enemy *hides in shadows* and has no regard for human life. This is an enemy who *preys on* innocent and unsuspecting people, then runs for cover [...] that tries to *hide...*” (CR 12.9).

Here also, the concept of freedom is opposed to the malignant enemy forces: “There is *only one force of history* that can [...] expose the pretensions of *tyrants* [...] and that is the force of *human freedom*” (IA 2005).

3.5. A state of exception

“The federal government and all our agencies are conducting business, but *it is not business as usual*.” (CR 12.11)

²². A theme, as a matter of fact, of the axis of evil speech (SoUA 2002).

The extraordinary circumstances arising from a state of war are bound to have an impact in the life of a country. The war on terror was in this sense no exception, far from it. We will see in part IV to what extent this has been a major fact in the conduct of public affairs in the United States. Here we will see how this is reflected in the texts.

Right after the attacks, President Bush showed a commendable concern with the preservation of the American way of life in the face of terrorist action: "...we will not allow this enemy to win the war by *changing our way of life* or *restricting our freedoms*" (CR 12.9). The aim was then "...to *find* those responsible and to *bring them to justice*" (OO 11.9). Yet, very soon afterwards the difficulties involved in pursuing the perpetrators must have come home to the Bush administration, who already started announcing the sidelining of those principles: "Whether we *bring our enemies to justice*, or *bring justice to our enemies*, justice will be done" (JSC 20.9).

Of course, it would not be the same kind of justice. Here starts, in fact, a series of references to the way suspected terrorists will be treated. Bringing them to justice is still a possibility that gets mentioned occasionally: "we will [...] *bring terrorists to justice*" (SoUA 2002); "We will continue this war on terror until *all* the killers are *brought to justice*" (RA 23.8.2003). But most of the time we see terms and expressions far removed from the vocabulary of constitutional principles: "we have struck back against terror worldwide, *capturing* and *killing* terrorists" (RA 13.9.2003); "we have *captured* or *killed* terrorists across the Earth" (RA 22.1.2005).

The way treatment of suspected terrorists is presented has sometimes a striking feature, namely the use of a language redolent of dubious Far West humour: "...more than 3,000 suspected terrorists have been arrested in many countries. Many others have met a different fate. Let's put it this way – *they are no longer a problem* to the United States..." (SoUA 2003); "We have captured and interrogated thousands of terrorists, while others have *met their fate* in *caves and mountains* in Afghanistan" (RA 16.11.2002).

Restrictions imposed by law are seen as obstacles in the conduct of war and therefore they are referred to in dismissive terms: "The Senate bill would force the new department to fight against terror threats *with one hand tied behind its back*. The department of homeland security must be able [...] to respond to threats immediately, without being forced to *comply with a thick book of bureaucratic rules*. Yet the current Senate approach keeps in place a *cumbersome process*..." (RA 21.9.2002).

As opposed to these unwelcome restrictions, there are calls for flexibility and the provision of law enforcement agencies with all necessary resources: "the House of Representatives passed a good bill [...] that gives me the *flexibility* to confront emerging threats quickly and effectively" (RA 21.9.2002); "we must continue to give our homeland security and law enforcement personnel *every tool they need* to defend us" (SoUA 2004).

The need for extraordinary resources is justified by reference to the extraordinary

lengths to which the administration must go in these exceptional circumstances: “*Whatever* action is required, *whenever* action is necessary, I will defend the freedom and security of the American people” (SoUA 2003); “We will do *everything in our power* to make sure that that day never comes” (SoUA 2003).

Not only the nation is at war, but it is a war of a different kind: “...a *new kind of war*. They applied *new tactics* and *new technology* to rout a *new kind of enemy*” (RA 29.12.2001). And this newness requires also a change of behaviour: “we are taking *unprecedented steps* to defend the homeland” (RA 24.7.2004); “In the three and a half years since September the 11th, 2001, we have taken *unprecedented actions* to protect Americans” (SoUA 2005).

The state of exception is at times set forth explicitly: “We are operating on *heightened security alert*” (CR 12.11). And even as something that is there to stay, that will come to be a fixture of national life: “The last time I spoke here, I expressed the hope that *life would return to normal*. In some ways, it has. In others, *it never will*” (SoUA 2002).

Naturally, there are constant assurances about the concern to uphold constitutional principles and civil liberties: “Our government’s first duty is to protect the American people. The Patriot Act fulfills that duty in a way that is *fully consistent with constitutional protections*” (RA 17.4.2004); “we’re strengthening our defenses against terrorist attack, *while upholding our constitutional liberties*” (RA 29.12.2001). And yet, as late as 2004 a need seems to have been felt (probably as a result of social pressure) to oversee the enforcement of such principles and liberties: “To *continue* to protect the freedoms and privacy of our citizens, I’ve established a *civil liberties board* to monitor information-sharing practices” (RA 28.8.2004).

3.6. The need for unity. Undeclared patriotism

“This is a day when *all* Americans from *every* walk of life *unite* in our resolve for justice and peace.” (OO 11.9)

The sense of community we have seen implicitly expressed in section 3.4 becomes also explicit in many occasions. It is an expression of the need for cooperation and solidarity arising in any common enterprise, but also of the loyalty required more specifically in times of war. To the extent that there exists two camps, calls for inner cohesion within each of them will inevitably be made. These rallying cries cover two dimensions: the domestic one that we will next look into, and the international one, that will be the object of section 3.7.

Within the United States, two different types of audience are called to unite. First, individual citizens. This produces one of the most recurrent and elaborate themes in Bush’s speeches: “America is the most *diverse* nation on earth. Yet, in a moment we discovered again that we are a *single people*, we share the *same allegiance*, we live under the *same flag* – and when you strike *one* American, you strike us *all* [...] a true *united* country. We’ve been *united* in our grief and we are *united* in our resolve” (RA

6.7.2002); “We have *one* country, *one* constitution, and *one* future that *binds us*. And when we *come together* and *work together*, there is no limit to the greatness of America” (RA 6.11.2004).

The second group are the elected representatives of the people. Since many policy measures have to be formally approved by Congress, its allegiance becomes fundamental. President Bush often reminds them of the need for bipartisanship: “I want to thank the members of Congress for their *unity* and support. America is *united*” (CR 12.9); “Our country and our Congress are now *united in purpose*. America is *speaking with one voice*” (RA 12.10.2002); “we must act, first and foremost, *not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as Americans*” (SoUA 2002).

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects in President Bush’s addresses is the nearly total absence of explicit references to patriotism. These are replaced with the omnipresent mentions of America’s *grandeur* and of the need for unity. And we should not forget that the main piece of legislation adopted (on 25.10.2001) in response to the attacks bears, precisely, the name “USA PATRIOT Act”, an acronym for the contorted title *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act*.

As a matter of fact, probably the only occurrence of the term *patriotism* in the analyzed texts is by no means a trivial one: “American *patriotism* is still a living *faith*” (RA 6.7.2002). That is to say, patriotism might not be very open, but it is actually seen as a religion, the ultimate focus of loyalty and a shield against dissent.

3.7. America and the world

“America and our friends and allies join with *all* those who want peace and security *in the world*, and *we stand together...*” (OO 11.9)

“America is *leading the world* in a titanic *struggle against terror*.” (RA 8.6.2002)

The need for unity has also an international dimension. The United States’ unilateral actions in the war on terror, overstepping the United Nations’ mandate, gave rise to worldwide controversy. In his addresses, President Bush tries again and again to allay these concerns and give the impression that the whole operation is not a whim of his country, but rather a task for the international community. This idea is encapsulated in very frequent expressions like *America, along with its coalition partners; the United States and our allies; our country and our friends; America and the international community; America and the civilized world...*

The starting point for this argument is the cleavage between the two sides in the war on terror. The attacks are portrayed to have been aimed not only at the United States, but at the whole world: “This enemy attacked *not just our people* but all freedom-loving people *everywhere in the world*” (CR 12.9). Or, at least, the civilized part of it: “This is *not [...]* just America’s fight [...]. This is *the world’s* fight. This is

civilization's fight" (JSC 20.9); "the *civilized world* faces unprecedented dangers" (SoUA 2002). The proof is that in the Twin Towers many nationals of all over the world died along with Americans: "Nor will we forget the citizens of 80 other nations who died with our own: dozens of Pakistanis; more than 130 Israelis..." (JSC 20.9).

Therefore, the United States expects other nations to support it in the war on terror, by forming a *coalition of the willing*: "We ask every nation to join us" (JSC 20.9); "Today, the United States is *joined by more than 90 nations* in a *global coalition* against terrorism" (RA 23.11.2002).

America is not only on the same side as the civilized world, it is *leading* it. This is made patent, interestingly, already in the 2001 inauguration ceremony, long before the attacks: "Some seem to believe that our politics can afford to be petty because, *in a time of peace*, the stakes of our debates appear small. But the stakes for America are never small. *If our country does not lead the cause of freedom, it will not be led* [...] *We must live up to the calling we share*" (IA 2001). Thus, in statements bordering on the patronizing, the United States is presented as the world leader and the world itself, as dependent on it: "*The world depends on America's* strength and purpose" (RA 25.1.2003); "*Without America's* active involvement in the world, the ambitions of tyrants would go unopposed, and millions would live at the mercy of terrorists. *With America's* active involvement in the world, tyrants have learned to fear, and terrorists are on the run" (RA 5.7.2003).

Since the United States' leading role in the civilized world does not arise from a concrete mandate, it has to be presented as an undefined *calling*: "History has *called* America and our allies to action, and it is both *our responsibility* and our privilege to fight freedom's fight" (SoUA 2002); "we must also remember our *calling* as a blessed country is to *make this world better*" (SoUA 2003). This is a term that is often used with a transcendental meaning, as synonymous with *vocation*. Again, we are slowly entering the semantic field of religion, as we saw in the previous section. In this case, the United States is assigned almost a prophetic role attached to a particular kind of faith: "*America came into the world with a message for mankind*, that all are created equal and all are meant to be free. There is no American race, there's only an American *creed*" (RA 6.7.2002).

The coalition of the willing, nonetheless, does not group equal members. The leader intends to keep its independence of decision. This is plain in stated doctrine: "While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, *we will not hesitate to act alone*, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense" (NSS 2002); "In exercising our leadership, we will respect the values, judgment, and interests of our friends and partners. Still, we will be *prepared to act apart* when our interests and unique responsibilities require" (NSS 2002), as well as in concrete public statements: "There is a difference, however, between leading a coalition of many nations, and *submitting* to the objections of a few. America will never *seek a permission*

slip to defend the security of our country” (SoUA 2004) (the *permission slip* meaning, obviously, a United Nations resolution authorizing the use of force). This is, perhaps, what is meant by “a *distinctly American* internationalism” (NSS 2002).

3.8. Duration and aims

“I ask for your *patience* [...] in what will be a *long struggle*.” (JSC 20.9)

One of the aspects which provoked the most criticism on the war on terror has been the lack of clear goals and of a set timetable. From the beginning, statements by the Bush administration have put across, first of all, the uncertainty surrounding the duration of the conflict: “The war against terrorists of global reach is a global enterprise of *uncertain duration*” (NSS 2002); “*Whatever the duration* of this struggle, and whatever the difficulties...” (SoUA 2003); and, second, a warning about the likely length of the operation: “The *threat of terror* will be with us *for years to come*, and we remain resolved to see this conflict *through to its end*” (RA 16.11.2002); “Americans should not expect one battle, but a *lengthy campaign*, unlike any other we have ever seen” (JSC 20.9).

After a while, in order to counter such concerns, some addresses started carrying a false impression of precision: “We will remain in Iraq *as long as necessary*, and *not a day more*” (RA 1.3.2003); “Our forces will be coming home *as soon as their work is done*” (RA 22.3.2003). But this, obviously, was not adding any more relevant information.

As for the aims, both generally of the war on terror, and specifically of the war in Iraq, the same dynamics can be observed. Sometimes, whatever aims are set forth, they are extremely vague: “We are planning a broad and sustained campaign *to secure our country and eradicate the evil of terrorism*” (RA 15.9.2001); “we will carry on the campaign against global terror until we achieve *our goal*: The *peace that comes from victory*” (RA 26.1.2002). On other occasions, the purported aims come across as downright excessive, and this amounts to the same, since a goal that is unattainable by definition cannot be considered in a serious manner: “...with the ultimate goal of *ending tyranny in our world*” (NDU 2005); “we will answer *every danger* and *every enemy* that threatens the American people” (SoUA 2003).

In a further attempt to give an impression of clarity of views, the addresses contain some formal claims about clear strategy. These claims come always in a rigorous structure, with an appearance of logical order:

“Our nation will continue [...] in the pursuit of *two great objectives*. *First*, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And, *second*, we must prevent the terrorists [...] from threatening the United States and the world” (SoUA 2002); “The *goal* of our coalition is to help the Iraqi people build a stable, just and prosperous country [...]. To reach that goal, we are following a *clear strategy*. *First*, [...] *Secondly*, [...] *And third*, ...” (RA 11.10.2003).

3.9. The omnipresence of danger

“We’re a nation *in danger*.” (RA 7.8.2004)

The overwhelming shock that came over the United States on September 11th caused at first a state of sheer panic. With the passage of time, this feeling settled into a more subdued, but also more insidious one of fear. This, of course, was one of the objectives of the terrorists in the first place. For a while, warnings about present dangers were understandable: “...we must *remain* keenly aware of the *threats* to our country” (CR 12.11); “the *enemy is still at large, threatening* our safety and security” (RA 21.9.2002).

But very soon these warnings were being projected into a very long term, as a fixture of the future American way of life: “The *threat of terror* will be with us *for years to come* [...]” (RA 16.11.2002); “...protect our citizens and strengthen our nation against the *ongoing threat of another attack*. Time and distance from the events of September the 11th will *not make us safer* unless we act on its lessons “ (SoUA 2002). The dangers are presented not only as permanent, but also as growing with time: “The *danger* to our country is *grave* and it is *growing* [...] The *dangers* we face will only *worsen from month to month and year to year*...” (RA 28.9.2002).

And the only alternative to this future of permanent terror and fear is a strong and determined reaction; namely: “The only alternative to *victory* is a future of *terror*” (RA 10.11.2001); “...it is natural to wonder if America’s *future is one of fear*. Some speak of an *age of terror*. I know there are *struggles* ahead and *dangers* to face [...] *As long as* the United States of America is *determined and strong*, this will not be an age of terror; this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world” (JSC 20.9).

Moreover, years after the attacks the rhetoric of fear does not seem to have subsided. As late as february 2005, President Bush was still declaring in the State of the Union Address: “Our country is still the target of terrorists” (SoUA 2005).

The result of all these warnings is the emergence of a climate of fear permeating the whole society’s everyday life. It is a culture of constant vigilance, suspicion and apprehension, on the part of both the government: “Analysts will be responsible for *imagining the worst*, and planning to counter it” (RA 8.6.2002); “Center personnel will also prepare the *daily terrorism threat report*...” (RA 28.8.2004), and the citizens: “Raising the threat level also informs the general public to be *more alert to their surroundings* and prepared for *possible emergencies in the event of an attack*” (RA 15.2.2003); “Our country is grateful to all our fellow citizens who *watch for the enemy*, and *answer the alarms*, and *guard America* by their *vigilance*” (RA 11.9.2004).

3.10. The paramountcy of security

“Our *first priority* must always be the *security* of our nation.” (SoUA 2002)

The logical reaction to a climate of insecurity is placing security at the center of policy: “...our *national security*. This is *the most basic commitment* of America’s

government, and *the greatest responsibility* of an American President” (RA 10.2.2001); “*Defending* our Nation against its enemies is the *first and fundamental commitment* of the Federal Government” (NSS 2002). This will necessarily demand policies whose comprehensiveness and funding are proportionate to the magnitude of the threat: “America will do *what is necessary* to ensure our nation’s *security*” (SoUA 2002); “*Whatever it costs* to defend our country, *we will pay*” (SoUA 2002).

And finally, the concern with safety makes its way into even the most prosaic social formulae: “Laura and I wish every American a happy and *safe* Thanksgiving weekend” (RA 27.11.2004).

3.10.1. The three kinds of security

“We need to *win the war*, we need to *protect our homeland*, and we must *strengthen our economy*.” (RA 13.7.2002)

So, security is presented as the main priority of the Bush administration. When it comes as an unqualified concept, security means most frequently *national* security, that is, the protection of the country as a whole, mainly from threats coming from beyond its borders. In this sense, it is closely associated to the concept of *defense*, meaning in turn protection through military means. Unqualified *security* can also, less frequently, mean *homeland* security, or the protection of citizens, within the country, from threats that at least have materialized inside the national territory. The related policy fields are, in this case, civil protection and law enforcement.

In his addresses, President Bush refers to security not only in these two senses, but also in the economic one, meaning economic growth and employment creation. Very often he presents the three kinds of security as associated goals of his administration: “Once we have funded our *national security* and our *homeland security*, the final great priority of my budget is *economic security*” (SoUA 2002); “as we act to *win the war*, *protect our people*, and *create jobs* in America...” (SoUA 2002). The range of security modalities is sometimes expanded even further: “economic security [...] health security [...] retirement security” (SoUA 2002).

When these three varieties of security come up together in discourse, they are just juxtaposed, without any sort of explicit logical nexus between them. It is not said whether they are conflicting or mutually reinforcing goals. We do get the impression, though, that they are politically complementary. However, from such a frequent juxtaposition an indefinite feeling emerges sometimes that, as a matter of fact, a certain causal relation exists between them, if only because of the association of ideas created by the juxtaposition in the mind of the receiver of the message. It is as if the pursuit of war was in some way conducive also to economic recovery: “who will lead our country during a time of *war* and *economic opportunity*” (RA 30.10.2004); “We’ll *prevail in the war*, and we will *defeat this recession*” (SoUA 2002); “I will sign several important new laws to help *secure the homeland* and *create jobs*” (RA 23.11.2002); “In 2003 [...] we must work to make our nation *safer*, more *prosperous*...” (RA 25.1.2003).

3.10.2. Equating freedom with security

“I will defend the *freedom and security* of the American people.” (SoUA 2003)

Freedom and its synonym *liberty* are two terms which often find themselves associated to *security*. Interestingly, one of the most widespread criticisms raised against policies of the Bush administration has been that the latter has come at the price of the former. But their close and recurrent association in speech could be a way of linking both concepts as interdependent instead of as conflicting: “the cause of *freedom and security* is worth our struggle” (RA 10.4.2004); “the *price* of freedom and security is *high*” (SoUA 2002).

In the same way, freedom appears as the opposite of *fear*, which is in turn the opposite of *security*. This is, in purely logical terms, quite normal, but it becomes odd when one remembers that in the United States fear has recently been used precisely to limit liberties:

“In this struggle of *freedom* against *fear*...” (RA 20.10.2001); “*freedom* is the answer to hopelessness and *terror*” (RA 15.5.2004).

In any case, *freedom* and *liberty* seem to be sometimes used for their mantra-like effect: sprinkled liberally on the discourse to give it a positive flavour: “The attack on *freedom* in our world has reaffirmed our confidence in *freedom*’s power to change the world. We are all part of a great venture: To extend the promise of *freedom* in our country, to renew the values that sustain our *liberty*, and to spread the peace that *freedom* brings” (SoUA 2005).

3.11. References to history

“America has stood down enemies before...” (OO 11.9)

The need of the United States to build an historical past and to refer to it might well have become a cliché, it is however a reality. President Bush’s addresses also show this feature. He places historical flashbacks throughout his speeches with a view to instilling into his audiences a sense of pride and of certitude, and so legitimize his own policies. Pride in the nation’s former feats, and by analogy in the present ones. Certitude in a victorious outcome of the war. This is why historical referents must be unequivocally perceived in a positive light; controversial episodes like the Vietnam War or even the first Iraq War never come up.

A frequent theme of historical support are previous wars. The favorite example is, of course, World War II. First, the episode provoking America’s involvement, the attack of Pearl Harbour in December 1941: “In the space of only 102 minutes, our country lost more citizens than were lost in the *attack on Pearl Harbor*” (RA 11.9.2004). More generally, the most positive aspects of that war: “America has made and kept this kind of commitment before—in the peace that followed *World War II*” (RA 1.3.2003); “America has no truer friend than Great Britain. *Once again*, we are

joined together in a great cause” (JSC 20.9); “The *World War II Memorial* will stand forever as a tribute to the generation that fought that war [...] *Today, freedom faces new enemies*” (RA 29.5.2004). Another victorious war, the Cold War, gets a mention likewise: “During his presidency, *Harry Truman* recognized that our nation’s fragmented defenses had to be reorganized to win the *Cold War*” (RA 8.6.2002).

References to the founding fathers also come up, in this case with an explicit parallelism with the present situation: “Our country’s *founding generation* established liberty and justice *on this continent* more than two centuries ago [...] *Our duty as Americans* is to serve our country, to defend the cause of liberty, and to extend the realm of freedom *across the earth*” (RA 14.6.2003).

And finally, a quote that combines a reference to the creator of the national anthem with another symbol of American feats in World War II, and explicitly the attacks on the Twin Towers: “When Francis Scott Key saw the Stars and Stripes flying over *Fort McHenry* in 1814, he knew that liberty would persevere. That same faith was affirmed by Marines who planted the flag at *Iwo Jima*, and by the heroes of 9/11, who raised and saluted the flag at *Ground Zero*” (RA 14.6.2003). In this way, Bush turns September 11th into one of the great patriotic occasions in the history of the country.

4. Implications of political discourse as justifying actual policies

Political speech, by definition, is never gratuitous. Messages, be they open or hidden, are always issued with some purpose in mind. Therefore, they often have a reflexion in reality that it merits examination. In part III we have analyzed official political discourse in the United States after September 11th, as conveyed by President Bush. We have seen it organized around the *war/terror* semantic axis, and we have determined the main themes deriving from it. In the present part, we intend to ascertain the connexion between discourse and policy, that is to say, how certain policy measures of the Bush administration have been based on official discourse or, to put it differently, in what way such discourse has served to justify concrete policy decisions.

4.1. Ultimate political design and concrete policies

The events of September 11th have had far-reaching repercussions in the United States, in domestic as well as in foreign policy. The undeniable general rallying around President Bush and in support of his administration’s policies, however, has not completely silenced critical voices or assuaged misgivings over such policies. Some commentators have attempted to look behind the political façade and bring to light underlying motives and objectives. Amongst the most vocal and articulate critics, economist Paul Krugman and billionaire philanthropist George Soros stand out for their sharp and thought-out alternative view of things. This view is largely born out by the texts we have analyzed. Nevertheless, some nuances and qualifications are also possible, and this will be the object of section IV.2.

When he first took office on January 20th, 2001, George W. Bush put forward in his inaugural address his vision for American foreign policy. This was almost eight

months before the attack on the World Trade Center, but his statement was already perfectly relevant for what was to come:

“We will build our defenses beyond challenge, lest weakness invite challenge. We will confront weapons of mass destruction, so that a new century is spared new horrors. The *enemies of liberty and our country* should make no mistake: *America remains engaged in the world by history and by choice*, shaping a balance of power that favors freedom. We will defend our allies and our interests. We will show *purpose without arrogance*. We will *meet aggression and bad faith with resolve and strength*. And to all nations, we will speak for the values that gave our nation birth.” (IA 2001)

This vision was but a rather literary expression of principles expounded in a 1997 document by the neoconservative think tank Project for the New American Century (*Statement of Principles*, June 3, 1997). These principles can be summed up as follows:

“International relations are relations of power, not law; power prevails and law legitimizes what prevails [...]. The United States is unquestionably the dominant power in the post-Cold War world; it is therefore in a position to *impose its views, interests and values on the world*. The world would benefit from *adopting American values* because the American model has demonstrated its *superiority* [...]. The United States must *assert its supremacy in the world*.” (SOROS, 2004: 3-4)

There seems, then, to have been a previous political agenda that only came to fruition in the wake of September 11th. As a matter of fact, neoconservative calls for intervention in Iraq go back as far as 1992, when Paul Wolfowitz had argued for it and for preemptive attacks abroad (see KRUGMAN, 2004: 10). In 1998, likewise, some participants in the Project sent an open letter to President Clinton with the same argument on Iraq (see SOROS, 2004: 25). In this context, later claims about Saddam Hussein’s possession of weapons of mass destruction and about his alleged connexion to terrorist groups can be explained as attempts to make an Iraq war fit in with the declared overall war on terror. In the light of this hypothesis, many other actions and policies of the Bush administration become more understandable.

The declared state of war was not only a political end of the neoconservatives. It also happened to be a useful means to achieve other ends of their agenda. War gave President Bush the popular mandate he lacked at first because of the controversial way his electoral contest against Al Gore had been decided on. His personal popularity soared. As wartime Commander-in-Chief, he was endowed with a new legitimacy and came to be regarded as “a tough-minded hero, all determination and moral clarity” (KRUGMAN, 2004: xxxix).

Responding to the September 11th attacks involved a fundamental policy shift, namely from law-enforcement to military measures as a response to terrorism:

“The United States has shifted its conception of terrorism as a “crime” to

terrorism as an “act of war.” In the past, the United States classified international terrorism as a crime and applied legal means as the primary tool to fight it. More recently, however, the United States has moved away from reactive counter-terrorism law enforcement methods towards more proactive techniques to fight international terrorism.” (TIEFENBRUN, 2003: 367)

We have already seen (§ 3.3.2) some aspects relating to this choice. Although the Bush administration did take action in both fields, as the Patriot Act and the Homeland Security Act clearly show, when it came to the federal budget, a clear imbalance becomes apparent. Homeland security spending followed the general pattern of restrictive budget policies, with billions of dollars actually getting blocked just as defence spending kept increasing considerably. Besides controversy about the effectiveness of this approach, this has given rise to allegations of neglect and to misgivings as to the real motives behind the Iraq invasion:

“Treating the attacks of September 11 as crimes against humanity would have been more appropriate. Crimes require police work, not military action. To protect against terrorism, you need precautionary measures, awareness, and intelligence gathering [...]. Imagine for a moment that September 11 had been treated as a crime. We would have pursued Bin Laden in Afghanistan, but we would not have invaded Iraq.” (SOROS, 2004: 18)

“there are solid military reasons why modern regular forces are all but useless for fighting what is fast becoming the dominant form of war [low-intensity wars] in our age.” (VAN CREVELD, 1991: 29)

War was possible because an enemy was found. We have seen (§ 3.3.4) how important an adversary is for building political discourse. Yet, whereas in the case of electoral campaigns the adversary is the political *opponent* from another party, which only serves to rally one's own supporters. An *enemy*, on the other hand, serves in wartime to rally the minds and wills of the whole nation, since then the adversary is common. It is also a stranger, coming from beyond the borders to threaten our way of life, an outsider not deserving regard or fairness, or due process as would a criminal. After World War II, the official enemy for the United States had been communism. Many policy decisions had been based on this fundamental antagonism, amongst others the McCarthyist Witch Hunt in the 1950s and the Vietnam War. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of communism, this traditional enemy of recent times disappeared. Terrorism came to take on that role. But, since individual terrorists or terrorist groups could not justify attacks against sovereign states, the war on terror was declared to encompass terrorism-supporting states. Some of them were particularly targeted as members of the *axis of evil*. This targeting of individual states was, according to Daniel INNERARITY (2004: 72 ff), a way of reframing an elusive situation as a recognizable one, namely a conventional war with a traditional enemy that could be attacked with a regular army.

The existence of an enemy in times of war makes simplifications easier and serves to polarize the situation, as we have seen (§ 3.3.4 and 3.3.7). Simplification is, in turn,

fundamental in achieving polarization. The analyzed addresses are, in fact, extremely simplistic²³. They are constructed along Manichean schemes and a few very basic, primary ideas, avoiding complex argument or nuancing. They resort to constant repetition of the key words, which become mantras sticking easily to the mind of the audience. The result is a sustained escape from the inherent complexity of the subject and, therefore, from any rational questioning, thus hindering debate and criticism.

Instilling fear in a population is by definition the main goal of terrorism. In that sense, the September 11th attacks were fully successful. We will see later (§ 4.2) that this was not a difficult task. But the fact is, in any case, that fear was the defining emotion in the American population at the time, it has continued to be so to a large extent and has determined the reaction to events both by the population and by its leaders. We have seen (§ 3.9 and 3.10) how references to danger and the need for security abound in President Bush's public addresses. These mentions are usually not reassuring but rather alarmist, even apocalyptic, highlighting unknown threats and insidious dangers that put the survival of the country at risk.

“The loss of three thousand innocent lives is an enormous human tragedy, but it does not endanger our existence as a nation. To elevate the threat posed by al Qaeda to the level represented by nuclear war is a wild exaggeration that can be sustained only by cultivating a link between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.” (SOROS, 2004: 28)

To many, these frightening messages were overstatements intended to create a sense of emergency that would act as a spur to unity through the suspension of public scrutiny and criticism: “Those of us who have lived through these challenging times have been *changed* by them. We’ve come to know *truths that we will never question: evil is real*, and it must be opposed” (SoUA 2002). For instance, enactment by Congress of a major piece of law enforcement legislation, the controversial PATRIOT Act, took place on October 25th, 2001, precisely in the midst of the anthrax scare in Washington. The huge majority²⁴ supporting the Act has subsequently been attributed to “emotional voting” (HAMM, 2003: 10), and the Act itself has been widely criticized. Another instance of this “institutionalization of the politics of fear” is the announcement of Jose Padilla’s arrest and his alleged plot to explode a dirty bomb (the Justice Department later had to retract from its overplayed representation of facts (HAMM, 2003: 27).

Polarization combines with the state of fear and with calls for unity resulting in the checking of dissent. Even if patriotism is not often explicitly referred to (see § 3.3.6), opposing government policy or criticizing political leaders in wartime is considered to be unpatriotic. Nuancing and questioning become difficult when public opinion is confronted with a life-or-death crisis:

²³. Except for the National Security Strategy, which is after all an official strategy document not addressed to the wider public and, therefore, with a more rational, better argued approach.

²⁴. 357-66 in the House of Representatives and 98-1 in the Senate.

“The war on terror polarizes the world between *us* and *them*. If it becomes a matter of survival, nobody has any choice but to stick with his own tribe or nation whether its policies are right or wrong.” (SOROS, 2004: xi)

“Opposing restrictions on civil rights and liberties amounts to becoming an ally to the enemy.” (CASALS, 2002: 147)

And so, once al Qaeda had accomplished the aim by definition of a terrorist act, instilling terror in the population, the Bush administration played on that fear, exaggerated the danger confronting the nation and so provoked a lasting sense of emergency. The new situation was akin to an indefinite state of exception, whereby President Bush, as the leader of a country at war, “wrapped himself in the flag” (KRUGMAN) and got what amounted to a blank check for policy making. In this way, measures that in normal times would have stirred dissent, went almost unopposed, as they were considered a lesser evil in comparison with the evil of terrorism:

“On TV this looks like World War II [...] And the home front looks not like wartime but like a postwar aftermath, in which the normal instincts of a nation at war –to rally round the flag and place trust in our leaders– are too easily exploited [...] What this country needs is a return to normalcy” (KRUGMAN, 2004: 250, 25.11.2001)

The Bush administration could then proceed, unchecked, to implement a far-reaching domestic and foreign policy agenda. One of the most notorious aspects of the domestic side was the USA PATRIOT Act (the title was already clearly meant to dissuade criticism):

“The Patriot Act confers unprecedented powers on the executive branch and removes many of the constraints imposed by judicial processes. Taken together with its companion piece, the Homeland Security Act, it limits public access to government information while at the same time promoting government access to sensitive personal information and sharing that information among federal, state, and local authorities. Although the legislation seriously infringes civil liberties, it aroused little concern in the public because most of the legislation’s provisions are assumed to be directed against *them*, terrorists and foreigners, rather than *us*, innocent civilians” (SOROS, 2004: 37)

This curtailment of civil rights combines with another aspect, the blurring of semantic distinctions between war and terrorism, to result in legal anomalies and limbos like the Guantanamo Bay case. In this context, the relevance of definitions becomes clear (see § 2.2.2). One of the criticisms the PATRIOT Act has received is the “breathhtakingly vague and broad definition of terrorism and of aiding terrorists” (DWORKIN, 2002). As we have mentioned, definitions are fundamental in law-making. The broader the definition, the more inclusive the defined term can be, leaving too much discretionary power to the law enforcers:

“This language stretches the meaning of the word “war.” If Washington means “war” metaphorically, as when it speaks about a “war” on drugs, the

rhetoric would be uncontroversial, a mere hortatory device intended to rally support for an important cause. Bush, however, seems to think of the war on terrorism quite literally –as a real war– and this concept has worrisome implications. The rules that bind governments are much looser during wartime than in times of peace. The Bush administration has used war rhetoric precisely to give itself the extraordinary powers enjoyed by a wartime government to detain or even kill suspects without trial. In the process, the administration may have made it easier for itself to detain or eliminate suspects. But it has also threatened the most basic due process rights.” (ROTH, 2004)

“In the United States there is a general confusion about what constitutes terrorism [...] The absence of a generally-accepted definition of terrorism in the United States allows the government to craft variant or vague definitions which can result in an erosion of civil rights and the possible abuse of power by the state in the name of fighting terrorism and protecting national security.” (TIEFENBRUN, 2003: 367)

Thus, the Guantanamo prisoners are considered *enemy combatants* regardless of whether they have taken active part in hostilities, which (according to the Geneva Conventions) would warrant their detention until the end of the conflict.

The declared state of war, as we have seen (§ 3.8) was not accompanied by clear statements about the war’s duration or aims. War was thus presented as an open-ended situation about which the most that could be said was that it would be long. This ambiguity prevented any kind of assessment as to the progress of operations or the balance between achievements and resources invested. In the meantime, exceptional policies seemed to become long-term ones:

“Key provisions of the Patriot Act are set to expire next year. The terrorist threat will not expire on that schedule.” (SoUA 2004)

“But if this is war, it bears little resemblance to the wars America has won in the past [...] *How will we know when or if we’ve won?* [...] There will never be a day when we can declare terrorism stamped out for good. It will be more like fighting crime, where success is always relative and *victory is never final*, than like fighting a war. And the metaphor we use to describe our struggle matters: some things that are justifiable in a temporary time of war are not justifiable during a permanent fight against crime, even if the criminals are murderous fanatics [...]. We’re in this for the long haul, so any measures we take to fight terrorism had better be measures that we are prepared to live with indefinitely. The real challenge now is not to stamp out terrorism; that’s an *unattainable goal*. The challenge is to find a way to cope with the threat of terrorism without losing the freedom and prosperity that make America the great nation it is.” (KRUGMAN, 2004: 239)

In the general confusion brought about by gripping fear, some key aspects of the domestic neoconservative agenda were also put into practice without serious opposition. Defense spending rose dramatically, which seemed only logical in a war situation. But this was an exception in a general and avowed agenda to reduce federal

spending and the role of government overall:

“At a time when *we’re at war*, at a time when we need to *strengthen our economy*, Congress must *control wasteful spending* while funding the nation’s priorities.” (RA 9.11.2002)

“the spirit of the times was definitely against anything that looked like an increase in government spending, unless it was explicitly military.” (KRUGMAN, 2004: 230)

Calls for general budgetary discipline were justified as a way to deal with the growing federal deficit, which was itself the result, amongst other things, of a recession that had officially begun in March 2001. Employment was rising and the stock market was in crisis. Nevertheless, neither the deficit nor the uncertainties of a war situation prevented the Bush administration from implementing a long-term, regressive fiscal rebate of large proportions while denying its influence in the overall deficit:

“when it comes to tax cuts and military spending, the Bush administration’s budget is an exercise in unrestrained self-indulgence. There is a lot of stirring rhetoric, warning the nation that this is a time of war, in which everyone must make sacrifices [...] while there is much talk of hard choices, the administration seems loath to make any choices at all when it comes to defense spending.” (KRUGMAN, 2004: 239)

Some commentators did even suggest, through 2002, that a war would help economic recovery, starting a debate in the media: “if the economy needs a burst of federal spending, neither economics nor politics requires that this burst take the form of a war” (KRUGMAN, 2004: 88-89). Moreover, the United States’ dependence on foreign oil supplies was widely recognized as a hindrance for the country, “perhaps the single most important impediment to America’s control of its own destiny” (SOROS, 2004: 52). President Bush did not mention oil specifically, but rather “America’s energy independence”, or “our dependence on foreign energy sources”. In this connexion, two claims have been made. One, that invading Iraq had something to do with ensuring oil imports. And two, that the attacks had served to justify some controversial domestic energy measures:

“Since Sept. 11 there has also been a sustained effort, under cover of the national emergency, to open public lands to oil companies and logging interests. Administration officials claim that it’s all for the sake of national security.” (KRUGMAN, 2004: 249)

What is undeniable is that war actually functioned as a smoke screen, distracting public attention from an economic slowdown, rising unemployment, a spate of financial scandals, fiscal policies etc.

4.2. A conducive environment for the implementation of a pre-set agenda

The course of events in United States domestic and foreign policy after the events of September 11th was not only the result of the political will of the Bush administration but, to some extent, it was also facilitated by a number of circumstances

we will now comment upon. This is in order to avoid as much as possible falling into oversimplification, while recognizing the intrinsic complexity of the situation.

4.2.1. A society of fear

“Cultures differ by what they fear, and they change when their fears change” (INNERARITY, 2004: 147)

While it is a fact that the attack on the World Trade Center was primarily intended to intimidate the American people and government, and while there are signs that the Bush administration played on the resulting fears in order to further its political agenda, there are other circumstances that cannot be ignored. “The terrorists seem to have hit upon a weak point in our collective psyche. They have made us fearful” (SOROS, 2004: xi). In his book *La sociedad invisible* (*The Invisible Society*), Spanish philosopher Daniel INNERARITY says obsession with security –and the attendant fear caused by insecurity– is one of the defining features of modern societies:

“Nowadays, risk has taken the place formerly attributed to the production of material goods [...]. Class societies were interested in equality; risk societies strive after security [...] Passions formerly oriented to changing the world are invested today in securing what we have” [...] “in contemporary society “in contemporary society [...] caution has become institutionalized so that it can cover every aspect of life to an unprecedented extent” caution has become institutionalized so that it can cover every aspect of life to an unprecedented extent” (INNERARITY, 2004: 153 and 169)

And this intrinsic social fear is in direct proportion to the power a given society seems to have: “There is a kind of fear that arises the more powerful the society, that is to say, the more final its victory over fear seems to be” (INNERARITY, 2004: 148). There is little wonder, then, that the most powerful society in the world seems also the most frightened... In this situation, the traditional provider of security, the state, is left powerless:

“Amongst all possible demands, it is the one concerning security that gives public authorities the most headaches [...] It has been a while since threats and security stopped being territorial issues. And the states, which are basically subject to territorial imperatives, no longer know what to do [...] the demand for security is addressed to states at a time in which they see their powers diminish...” (INNERARITY, 2004: 168)

Governments, then, are tempted to magnify risks in order to escape accountability:

“Overmagnifying the terrorist threat has served several purposes [...] It has contributed to governments blurring away their responsibilities; it has prevented its handling according to a logic the effectiveness of which could be assessed. And, one of its most worrisome aspects is the fact that distinction between normalcy and exception has become so confused, that exceptional risks have empowered governments to introduce too many exceptions, something harming democratic normalcy.” (INNERARITY, 2004: 97)

4.2.2. Unilateralism as a continued trend

Nobody would underestimate the shock of the attack on the Twin Towers for the American people. It seems also true that the Bush administration has overplayed those events in order to justify some of its policies, as if September the 11th had opened a chasm in the flow of history and nothing could ever be as before. However, some scholars have qualified this view, arguing that, after all, September 11th did not fundamentally change US foreign policy or the world situation, as much as settled them on a previously established course. In this sense, therefore, the policies of the Bush administration have to be put into perspective, even when they did involve an acceleration of that trend:

“The 1990s saw, in the final analysis, America’s confident self-affirmation on the world scene, once it had rid itself of the uncomfortable Soviet rival. Nobody could counterbalance its power any more. Americans came thus to the conclusion that they could not consider themselves as an ordinary member of the international community [...] Unilateralism was not born with the Iraq war, or with September 11th, not even with George W. Bush’s election. It had been growing throughout the 1990s. It is under Clinton’s presidency that the United States kept away from major multilateral treaties [...] Both Bush’s election and September 11th just speeded up American unilateralism, but they did not create it out of the blue.” (BONIFACE, 2005: 20-1)

This is in sharp contrast with public opinion perceptions, as shown in the regular surveys by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Comparing the 1999 and the 2002 editions shows terrorism as becoming the biggest problem for the country; public support for an active role in the world for the United States is a stable factor; nevertheless, unilateral action remains contested in both cases, even in connexion with the war against terrorism. Working together with other countries is instead seen as a better course of action, including taking part in multilateral treaties. This public mood of “guarded engagement”²⁵ means that the United States leadership had to make a tremendous effort of public relations in order to make its case before the public and thereby win it over to its more interventionist policies. The results of the 2004 election are clear proof of this attempt’s success.

4.2.3. “Decades of escalating violence”

“In one way, that assault was the *culmination of decades of escalating violence*—from the killing of U.S. Marines in Beirut, to the bombing at the World Trade Center, to the attacks on American embassies in Africa, to the attacks on the USS Cole.” (NDU 2005)

This quote by President Bush by no means reflects a purely personal view of

²⁵. We should not forget the continuing national trauma from the Vietnam War and the resulting reluctance of Americans to engage in military intervention abroad. And yet, the commemoration of the fall of Saigon in May 2005 provoked comments to the effect that the United States had not learned the lessons from Vietnam...

things. Long before the attacks on the World Trade Center, in his 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington was talking about a latent dynamics, a *quasi war* between Islam and the West, going back to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. This hypothesis could easily be taken as a justification for both the attacks and for the war on terrorism. Both actions would thus be framed in an ongoing global trend:

“Both sides have, moreover, recognized *this conflict to be a war*. Early on, Khomeini declared, quite accurately, that “Iran is effectively *at war* with America,” and Qadhafi regularly proclaims holy war against the West. Muslim leaders of other extremist groups and states have spoken in similar terms. On the Western side, the United States has classified seven countries as “terrorist states,” five of which are Muslim [...]. This, in effect, identifies them as enemies [...], and thus recognizes the *existence of a state of war* with them. U.S. officials repeatedly refer to these states as “outlaw,” “backlash,” and “rogue” states—thereby placing them outside the civilized international order and making them *legitimate targets* for multilateral or unilateral countermeasures. The United States Government charged the World Trade Center bombers with intending “to levy a *war* of urban terrorism against the United States” and argued that conspirators charged with planning further bombings in Manhattan were “*soldiers*” in a *struggle “involving a war”* against the United States. If Muslims allege that the West wars on Islam and if Westerners allege that Islamic groups war on the West, it seems reasonable to conclude that *something very much like a war is underway*. [...] the participants in this war employ much more violent tactics against each other than the United States and Soviet Union directly employed against each other in the Cold War.” (HUNTINGTON, 1996: 216-7)

The *National Security Strategy* (2002) also refers explicitly to the *clash*. The fact that it does so to deny its validity does not show any less that it is a conceptual referent policy makers in the United States were keeping in mind:

“The *war on terrorism* is not a *clash of civilizations*. It does, however, reveal the clash inside a civilization, a battle for the future of the Muslim world.” (NSS 2002)

4.2.4. A growing conceptual confusion

In part II we have tried to analyze a number of definitional problems related to the terms *war* and *terrorism*. We have later seen how the interplay of these two overlapping concepts has been used in political discourse, as well as some practical policy problems resulting from it. In this sense, the use that has been made in the United States of both terms in an axis articulating political discourse was to some extent facilitated by a growing conceptual confusion predating September 11th but accentuated by the events of that day. Daniel INNERARITY sums it up:

“Terrorism deconstructs not only the *distinction between civil and military*, but also the distinction between *victory and defeat*, even between the victorious

and the defeated (the clearest example of this can be seen in the fact that it was never known when the Iraq war had finished and which side had won, as well as the fact that most casualties happened once the war seemed to have ended). Terrorism ignores limits and has also blurred distinctions that were hallmarks of our culture: that between barbarism beyond certain borders and civilization within those borders; that between soldiers and policemen on the one hand, and criminals on the other [...]. And finally, the distinction the loss of which causes us the most puzzlement is the one that *used to distinguish peace and war*, and that today has been replaced by a *general situation of indeterminate threat*" (INNERARITY, 2004: 74)

In the final analysis, however, despite all these contributing or facilitating factors, the fact remains that the war on terror and its associated policies were a political choice, not an unavoidable course of action:

"Even so, September 11, 2001, could not have changed the course of history to the extent that it has if President Bush had not responded to it the way he did" (SOROS, 2004: 3)

Samuel HUNTINGTON himself did recognize that the response *to date* to violent acts from the opposite side had been quite moderate, implying it could also be otherwise:

"To date, each side has, apart from the Gulf War, kept the intensity of the violence at reasonably low levels and *refrained from labeling violent acts as acts of war requiring an all-out response*." (HUNTINGTON, 1996: 216-7)

So, in the end, what the Bush administration chose to do was to break this trend of self-restraint and transform the ongoing *quasi war* into a full-blown war. Whereas the destruction of the Twin Towers was an act independent from its will, its response to it did involve a deliberate strategic and policy choice, thus taking Huntington's thesis of the *clash* to its logical consequences²⁶.

5. Conclusion

The terrorist attacks that took place on September 11th, 2001 in the United States caused widespread shock and fear, as well as social trauma in the population. The reactions of the leaders, as expressed in concrete policies, have had a huge impact on the subsequent course of events in the rest of the world.

In the present work, we have attempted to examine the connexion between these policy reactions and the official discourse that has served to communicate them to the public at large. We have found that official discourse in the United States after September 11th has revolved mainly around a semantic axis built around the concepts

²⁶. Without pretending to compare quite different situations, the proof that other sorts of response were possible was the reaction of Spain's newly elected leader, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who decided as soon as he came to power in March 2004 to withdraw troops from Iraq (as he had promised during the electoral campaign). Spain's March 11th had just happened, but no war was declared, even in the midst of similar shock and dismay in the Spanish society.

of war and terrorism.

After some introductory and methodological remarks in part I, we have analyzed in part II some conceptual problems related to the definition of *war* and, especially, of *terrorism*. We have found a semantic overlap between the two and we have commented on the resulting interplay and associated definitional problems, including efforts at finding a universal definition of *terrorism* and an outline of the main semantic features such definition should contain.

In part III, we have examined a corpus of relevant texts as a sample of United States official discourse from 2001 to 2005. By analyzing the semantic and structural makeup of such texts, we have found a series of recurrent themes focused on the ideas of the attack against the United States and the response to it, the whole discourse being aimed mainly at persuading public opinion of the need to close ranks and rally behind the leaders and their policies.

In part IV, finally, we have argued that a link exists between formal discourse and the political reality behind it. We have seen how actual attitudes and policies echo speech themes. The Bush administration seems to have taken the situation arising from the September 11th attacks as an opportunity to implement a far-reaching domestic and foreign policy agenda. In so doing, it has attracted widespread criticism, particularly over the resulting erosion of civil rights. However, we also take account of a series of underlying contributing factors which are independent from the will and actions of the political elite.

The main conclusion we have reached is the existence of a growing confusion between the concepts of *war* and *terrorism*, arising mainly from the ongoing process of globalization, and the fact that this confusion can be very easily used to overlook well-established legal frameworks like civil rights and public accountability.

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- *Inaugural Address (2001)*, Washington, 20.1.2001. [IA 2001]
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- *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 17, 2002. [NSS 2002]

8. Annex. Terrorism. Summary table of definitions^{a8}

SOURCE	DEFINITION
<i>Black's Law Dictionary</i>	"The use or threat of violence to intimidate or cause panic, esp. as a means of affecting political conduct."
Blakesley, C.L., <i>Terrorism, Drugs, International Law, and the Protection of Human Liberty</i> , 1922	Violence aimed at innocents (or non-combatants) to gain an edge over, or to coerce, a third party.
Gross, E., "Legal Aspects of Tackling Terrorism: The Balance Between the Right of a Democracy to Defend Itself and the Protection of Human Rights", <i>UCLA Journal of International Law and Foreign Affairs</i> , 89, 2001	"Terrorism is the use of violence and the imposition of fear to achieve a particular purpose, generally entailing the aspiration to overthrow an existing regime, or fight it, and where the persons forming the group organize in a tightly controlled structure."
United States Anti-Terrorism Act, 1996	"The unlawful use of violence against the United States, citizens of the United States or any other nation, outside the boundaries of the United States, apparently intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence government policy, or to affect the conduct of a government for political or social objectives."
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 1980	"The unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in the furtherance of political or social objectives."
United States State Department	"Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience."
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provision) Act, 1984 and 1989 (UK)	"Terrorism means the use of violence for political ends and includes any use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear."
Lord Lloyd, <i>Inquiry into Legislation Against Terrorism</i> , 1996 (UK)	"The use of serious violence against persons or property or the threat to use such violence, to intimidate or coerce a government, the public, or any section of the public, in order to promote political, social, or ideological objectives."

^{a8} The following definitions have been taken mainly from TIEFENBRUN (2003), but also from STEWARD and from GOLDER (2004).

SOURCE	DEFINITION
Criminal Code (France)	<p>Acts are terrorist acts when they are intentionally committed by an individual entity or by a collective entity in order to seriously disturb law and order by intimidation or by terror.</p> <p>[Attempted murder, assault, kidnapping, hostage-taking on airplanes, ships, all means of transport, theft, extortion, destructions, and crimes committed during group combat, the production or ownership of weapons of destruction and explosives including the production, sale, import and export of explosives, the acquisition, ownership, transport of illegal explosive substances, the production, ownership, storage, or acquisition of biological or chemical weapons, and money laundering.]</p>
European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism (1977)	<p>All States must treat assassination, hostage taking, bomb attacks, and hijacking (major terrorist offenses), as 'common crimes' and can not refuse extradition. However, an escape clause permits the contacting state to reserve the "right to regard a certain offense as a political one."</p>
Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on combating terrorism (2002/475/JHA) (EU)	<p>"1. Each Member State shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the intentional acts referred to below in points (a) to (i), as defined as offences under national law, which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organisation where committed with the aim of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — seriously intimidating a population, or — unduly compelling a Government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or — seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation, shall be deemed to be terrorist offences: <p>(a) attacks upon a person's life which may cause death;</p> <p>(b) attacks upon the physical integrity of a person;</p> <p>(c) kidnapping or hostage taking;</p> <p>(d) causing extensive destruction to a Government or public facility, a transport system, an infrastructure facility, including an information system, a fixed platform located on the continental shelf, a public place or private property likely to endanger human life or result in major economic loss;</p> <p>(e) seizure of aircraft, ships or other means of public or goods transport;</p> <p>(f) manufacture, possession, acquisition, transport, supply or use of weapons, explosives or of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, as well as research into, and development of, biological and chemical weapons;</p> <p>(g) release of dangerous substances, or causing fires, floods or explosions the effect of which is to endanger human life;</p> <p>(h) interfering with or disrupting the supply of water, power or any other fundamental natural resource the effect of which is to endanger human life;</p> <p>(i) threatening to commit any of the acts listed in (a) to (h).</p> <p>2. This Framework Decision shall not have the effect of altering the obligation to respect fundamental rights and fundamental legal principles as enshrined in Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union."</p>

SOURCE	DEFINITION
UN General Assembly, Resolution 54/109, 1999 UN General Assembly, Draft International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, 1999	"Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstances unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature, that may be invoked to justify them."
Alexander, Y., in Y. Alexander and E. H. Brenner (eds), <i>Terrorism and The Law</i> , 2001	"the calculated employment or the threat of violence by individuals, sub-national groups, and state actors to attain political, social, and economic objectives in the violation of law, intended to create an overwhelming fear in a target area greater than the victims attacked or threatened"
Bassiouni, Cherif, <i>International Terrorism: Multilateral Conventions (1937-2001)</i> , 2001	"An ideologically-motivated strategy of internationally proscribed violence designed to inspire terror within a particular segment of a given society in order to achieve a power-outcome or to propagandize a claim or grievance, irrespective of whether its perpetrators are acting for and on behalf of themselves, or on behalf of a state."
US National Security Strategy, 2002	"premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents", "avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents"
League of Nations, 1937	"All criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or the general public."
Jenkins, B., <i>Terrorism and beyond</i> , 1985	"Terrorism is the use or threatened use of force designed to bring about political change."
Poland, J. M., <i>Understanding terrorism</i> , 1988	"the premeditated, deliberate, systematic murder, mayhem, and threatening of the innocent to create fear and intimidation in order to gain a political or tactical advantage, usually to influence an audience."
Hoffman, B., <i>Inside terrorism</i> , 1999	"Terrorism is political violence by conspiratorial cells of sub-national groups designed to have psychological effects."
Anggoro, K.	"an illegal act designed to endanger people and property and cause fear."
Golder and Williams 2004	"political, religious or ideologically-motivated violence that causes harm to people or property, intended either to coerce a civilian population or government, or to instil fear in the population or a certain part of it."
International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, 1999	"...Any other act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act"

SOURCE	DEFINITION
Draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (UN)	<p>“(1) Any person commits an offence within the meaning of this Convention if that person, by any means, unlawfully and intentionally, causes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Death or serious bodily injury to any person; or (b) Serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a State or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or the environment; or (c) Damage to property, places, facilities, or systems referred to in paragraph 1(b) of this article, resulting or likely to result in major economic loss, when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing an act.”
Executive Order No 13,224, 66, Sept 23, 2001 (US)	<p>“an activity that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) involves a violent act or an act dangerous to human life, property or infrastructure; and (ii) appears to be intended – (A) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (B) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (C) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, kidnapping, or hostage-taking.”
Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act (US Patriot Act), 2001	<p>“(2) the term ‘international terrorism’ means activities that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or of any State; (b) appear to be intended – (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and (c) occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum; (...) <p>(5) the term ‘domestic terrorism’ means activities that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; (b) appear to be intended – (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and (c) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.”

SOURCE	DEFINITION
<p>Terrorism Act, 2000, 2001 (UK)</p>	<p>“1. (1) In this Act ‘terrorism’ means the use or threat of action where –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the action falls within subsection (2); (b) the use or threat is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public or a section of the public; and (c) the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause. <p>(2) Action falls within this subsection if –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) involves serious violence against a person; (b) involves serious damage to property; (c) endangers a person’s life, other than that of the person committing the action; (d) creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public; or (e) is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system. <p>(3) The use or threat of action falling within subsection (2) which involves the use of firearms or explosives is terrorism whether or not subsection (1)(b) is satisfied.</p> <p>(4) In this section –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) ‘action’ includes action outside the United Kingdom; (b) a reference to any person or to property is a reference to any person, or to property, wherever situated; (c) a reference to the public includes a reference to the public of a country other than the United Kingdom; and (d) ‘the government’ means the government of the United Kingdom, of a Part of the United Kingdom or of a country other than the United Kingdom. <p>(5) In this Act a reference to action taken for the purposes of terrorism.”</p>
<p>UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change</p>	<p>“any action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the Geneva Conventions and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004), that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.”</p>